

To  
my Sylvia who is my life,  
and to  
Danielle, Karen & Michael  
to whom we gave life  
and to  
Oliver, Finley & Nathaniel  
for whom I wrote these  
memories



# **An Eye – or is it I? – on myself**

**David Lewin**  
London Oct. 2009



# Introduction

One of the things which worry me most about setting down these memories and thoughts is that I have so few memories. It is absolutely amazing even to me what a black hole there is in my past. I think that one explanation is the fact that I do not get pictures into my brain. It seems there are about 10% of the population who have this difficulty or is it better to use the word problem?. I never SEE in my head and if, then only for a fleeting second. I have often been asked "then how do you prepare a trip" - and I do not know the answer, I just do and am good at finding my way, I mostly know the direction "by instinct". The other "worry" I have is that I am convinced that I suffer from a peculiar form of Dyslexia. I never could remember names and I always replaced one word with another without realising that I had done so. As a child in Haifa, my mother sent me to collect something from a woman in Hillel Street. That was 2 streets lower down in Haifa and maybe 100 houses along that road. I went all the way there, knocked on the door, spoke to the woman (whom I did not know) and went home again, empty handed. "Mrs Fleischer does not live there" I told my mother. "But I sent you to Mrs Metzger, not Fleischer, you will have to go again".

This replacement of one word for another, in this example both mean a butcher in German, has plagued me - always. Another example is the fact that when I first acquired a car, having previously ridden motor cycles for some years, I parked it in the middle of town and later could not find it. I sought the help of a policeman and asked where Sheriff Street was. "There is no such place here" was the answer. Now I KNEW that I had a car, of which I was very proud and after some words with that policeman he finally stumbled upon the solution. My car was in Marshall Street! It is somewhat hopeless with a brain like that, but I have muddled though. Sylvia is excellent at knowing

which town or city I speak of when haphazardly I utter some name.

There are other strange associations with memories. Mine are probably connected to the photograph albums which my mother and grandparents assembled of me as I grew up. In all probability the incidents or episodes which I "remember" are connected to events of which a photograph is available and so reinforces events which clearly happened.

So you see, there is some fear of writing. It really takes forever, because I am very slow at it and inaccurate. My reading too, is very slow. Reading out aloud is worse than hopeless. But writing can be done, it is done in silence.

I have retired and am finally able to do all the things I want to do as opposed to all those things I have to do. I also have a motto "sleep is a waste of time".

If I had been God and was writing the 10 Commandments, I would have written only one: Do not do unto others what you will not have others do unto you. To me all the rest are merely additions to this principle. I do not see that Murder should be the worst deed a person does to another. I believe that GBH as it is known here = Grievous Bodily Harm should be (such as maiming, rape etc). I have to accept the laws of morality as laid down in society over thousands of years, but I often feel that they are wrong

As Rabbi Hillel said: *Im ein ani li - mi li?*  
*Im lo ach'shav - ey'matai??*  
*Uch'she'ani rak leatz'mi - ma ani?*

[ translated this means something like  
If I don't do things for myself, who will do them for me?  
If not now, when?  
And if I am only for myself, who am I? ]

This has always been the single most important message which has impressed me more than any other saying I have heard and has really been my standard by which I have evaluated right and wrong. His other teaching was equally important for me:

*“Do not do to another what you will not have them do to you. That is the essence, the rest are the consequences, go and study them.”*

From my point of view selfishness is the single most disliked trait in any human being. I can excuse all manner of failings, but never selfishness. I guess this is a direct extension of Rabbi Hillel’s teaching. It is with some sadness that I see more and more of society accept selfishness as “the way of the world”. At the same time I also have that – acceptably a bizarre – notion that charity is also based on selfishness. I have derived so much pleasure out of helping others. Would I have helped if I did not derive that pleasure out of those actions? I doubt it, at least not to the same extent and with the same amount of willingness – ergo, charity is based on selfishness. Extending from this is my theory that we live in a period of history which I call the “Social Revolution”, named much the same as we named the “Industrial Revolution”. What follows must, to some extent be seen as “tongue in cheek”, but it is true, nevertheless.

In the “past,” Society was ruled by the Landlords and the Clergy. Then a “mistake” was made and the common man was allowed to learn to read. At the same time we created something called “Democracy” in which we have elections and the majority vote wins. Now, if you look at reality, the bulk of the population is made up of people who have had little education. I quote here the fact that it is the minority in society which obtains a higher level of education, while the bulk remains either uneducated or at least with less education. The latter are by far the majority and so in elections they have the decisive vote.

Another fact, which irks me is the way England educates its young. I have never understood how it came about that England managed to create that vast empire. For generations it has been prepared to educate the bulk of its young inadequately. At first it was 12, then 15, now at 16 that children were allowed to leave formal education. Equally, they are nowadays forced into formal education at age 4, when they are still far too young, instead of being allowed to enjoy their childhood – albeit while being prepared for “learning”? When the time comes and they leave school, there is nothing there to train them for a life of having to earn a living. Gone are the apprenticeships, gone to a large extent are the vocational courses. In Germany one could not employ an artisan unless the employer had a “Meisterpruefung” – in England anyone could set themselves up as a plumber / electrician or whatever and there was never a restriction on who could employ whom. The title “Engineer” was applied to so many things that had no connections to a formal Engineering qualification. It took the advent of the European unification into the European Union to force the UK, a most reluctant member of that club, to elevate its standards to what is acceptable. We may laugh at “straight bananas” rules coming out of Europe, but we do now at least and at last, have Health and Safety regulations [ actually going overboard with political correctness ], rules which considerably improved quality and safety in general life.

Another sentence, hanging on the toilet wall of a landlady in whose home I had rented a room so many years ago, was also very meaningful to me: It was one of those sayings, burnt into a piece of wood, that engraved themselves in my own mind and really has shaped the way I am.

*"There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill behoves any of us to talk about the rest of us."*



Google just now tells me that it actually ends with “To find fault with the rest of us” and that it is sometimes attributed to R.L. Stevenson, Kansas Gov. Hoch, E.T. Fowler and others.

The other thought was a report I half heard on CNN at the time of the Somalia-Eritrea conflict, which said that the Islamic Militias of the Union of Islamic Courts just being pushed back in Somalia, which is clearly seen as a “bad thing” also did a lot of good for the local population. I no longer recall in detail what this “good” consisted of, but will here take it for a fact for the sake of this argument: Out of this came the thought to me that it is time we stopped merely defending Israel and the Jews, while attacking militant Islamic Fundamentalism. Would it not be a good, sensible strategy to deliberately seek the good in Islam and publicise this? You might even parallel it – good among the Jews and good in the Islamic world being publicized side by side. Push that engraved saying “there is so much good.....”

In a way this works beautifully with my hobby horse of PMA – Positive Mental Attitude. I explain PMA thus: Take any terrible situation, one that gives you pain and sorrow. Then, however difficult, find something positive in the mess that seems only black (it never is only black) and then concentrate on that tiny bit of positive in the negative whole. It will not make the negative vanish, but it will make it easier to live with.... [I preached this belief to my children often until it turned out to have been too often. One day my Danielle came up with the perfect retort: “Daddy,” she said, “do you know what PMA really stands for? It is Positively Mental Attitude!” ] Maybe she was right??

## **Rules of Society:**

These have always been the bane of my life. I have never been willing to adhere to them or to accept them blindly. I feel that these rules were devised at a time when people of Religion and owners of Land were lording it over the rest of the population. They were not the product of a free thinking society. They largely inhibited self expression, self will, self determination, expression and self thought. I am, of course, not advocating a free for all anarchy and in all things the axioms of Rabbi Hillel must stand – but I do feel strongly that I do not want to follow rules blindly. They have got to make sense to me. So I guess I end up being a non-conformist. Our trend for “political correctness” in society is but an extreme example of the ridiculousness of what our society accepts. I vividly remember a little girl climbing on to a table in a manner which was dangerous for her while we were on a boat in New York on a visit to our cousins Linda Koebner & Ron. I had no idea who she was and I got up to steady her. “No” was the comment, “you cannot do this nowadays, you might be accused of molesting the child”.

Over the millennia in which man has lived in communities, he devised rules by which society conducted itself. There were rules for almost everything, including even how one eats. Etiquette is such a set of rules. I have always rebelled against these unless they were governed by “do not do unto others what you will not have others do unto you.”

Mostly rules were created by one group in order to subjugate or control others. Some such rules border on the ridiculous. In Germany you have to eat ALL that is put on your plate while in Poland you must always leave something on the plate to show that you have had enough. What then, I asked, did the population of Golub in West Prussia (where my father was born) do when in 1918 they changed from being German to being Poles??

Thoughts like this put me rather outside the accepted “norm of society” and the fact remains that I would rather use my logic than their rules.

“A cry for “Help” means now!” has also always been my motto. If a person asks for help, they mean they want help NOW – not later on when it is more convenient to me. Moreover, it is wrong to ask for payment – even part payment - when help is offered. There are some who feel that unless the recipient pays something towards the help you extend, they will not “appreciate” this help. To me that argument is abhorrent. Equally, I cannot abide to defer anything that needs to be done. If it needs to be done, then this is now – not later. Deferring things merely means that you make yourself a stack which is getting ever bigger.

But equally, not deferring things has meant that I tend to make my mind up immediately and quickly and not necessarily in the best considered way. I often will get up mid-meal in order to look something up rather than wait till the end of the meal to do so.

### **Making an offer:**

I have another basic principle here: If a person makes an offer, then they have to accept that there is a 50-50 chance that they will be taken up on that offer. So, if you do NOT want an offer to be taken up, then do not make it in the first place!

I love the teachings of my daughters: re the word “ASSUME”: they taught me: “Do not ASSUME Daddy because, if you do, you make an ASS out of U and ME...”

I am often accused of “Doggedness”. I tend not to let go when an idea has struck me, or when I feel strongly that I am right in something. Maybe “Tenacity” would be a better term here. It is amazing how so often in life something is impossible. You then argue, beg, cry, shout, curse, smile -

change NOTHING in the facts - but then eventually it becomes possible.

These few paragraphs above are meant to be examples of generalities which I believe to be true about me and which have largely guided the way I have conducted myself. I will now attempt to recall the salient parts of my first 72 years.

## 1933 – 1937 The early years

In 1933 my mother was studying medicine at Freiburg University and was kicked out because of the Nazi rules which had gripped the country. Her family saw to it that she and her younger brother went to Palestine, equipped with the vital £1000 which made her a legal and a desired immigrant. Her older brother was by then already a doctor in England, having studied in Edinburgh. Her younger brother Maenne failed to get a foothold in Palestine. He had bought a boat in Cairo in order to try to establish a fishing business in Aqaba. Eilat did not yet exist. They forgot to take into account that there was no population there to speak of and they had no refrigerated trucks with which to transport the catches to Tel Aviv..... He therefore left and went to England where he studied Chemistry.

In the same year my father was working for a firm of men's wear, who had numerous retail outlets in the Danzig area. His job was to collect the takings from these and as such he always had large sums of money on him. Consequently he had a licence to carry a side arm and owned one. On one fateful day the Hitler Youth sidled up to him and said that they thought it was high time that he contributed to the Party. At that point my father went to the police station, identified himself, produced his Licence and surrendered the gun. From the police he went to the nearest Railway Station and left the country for Palestine without ever going home again.

I know very little of my parents meeting other than the obvious fact that they did. With the hindsight of adulthood I must say that I am amazed that they ever did marry. My mother, the daughter of a successful research chemist and granddaughter of the Rabbi of Freiburg (coincidentally also a Lewin), was an ex-medical student kicked out of the University for being Jewish, who had to find a way of surviving in a hostile environment, without the native

language and with all the disadvantages of being a Yekke in Palestine. Yekke was the very apt collective noun for all ex-German Jews. No one actually knows why they were called this. Mainly the option goes towards the fact that they always observed a dress code as befits a cultured person from Central Europe – they would not be seen dead without the Jacket [Jacke Yekke], irrespective of the time of day or ambient temperature. Another theory is that it was an Acronym so beloved of those who participated in the reviving of the Hebrew Language and could stand in total contrast, depending only on the word you selected for the K-part of that word and thus could be with equal likelihood or disbelief a Yehudi K'SHE / KAL Havana – a Jew of difficult/easy comprehension. Anyway, back to the particular, my mother. Like the rest of her human-subgroup, she was not willing to make mistakes. Not in her language and not in her decision making processes. She clearly was “well to do” because she had those £1000 in the bank and must have been an attractive “catch”. She always said that in selecting a life-partner she chose a man who was tall [she was tiny] and with good eyesight (she had only 30% of normal vision, always needed glasses and suffered from Retinitis Pigmentosa [or whatever the correct term of that deficiency in her optical make-up]. My father, on the other had left his parents' home in 1918 with the end of World War 1, when Golub became Poland and he [12 years old then] was sent to live with his oldest sister Erna [12 years his senior] in Danzig in order to remain a German. Aba was the youngest of 6, his father had built up a haulage business using horses and carts to deliver goods from the end of the German railway into the hinterland of Poland/Russia. I never learned whether my father ever saw his parents again after 1918. My father's father remarried in 1925 and I have never heard of that fact from Aba. He just never spoke of this and I never asked. It was genealogical research in later years which revealed this part of my ancestry.

Anyway, those two met in Tel Aviv in 1933, Cupid had his way and things evolved. Prior to that my father had smuggled himself into Egypt. The £1000 were sent to Cairo and with that money my father was able to re-enter legally and legitimise himself in the eyes of the British Mandatory Authorities. It enabled him to become a fully fledged member of the bus cooperative, thus becoming a bus driver and no longer needing to do the menial task of just washing bus bodies and interiors. That same sum of money did many more similar circuits and saved or legitimised many individual lives.....

My mother's parents were still in Ludwigshafen. My Grandfather was Chief Research Chemist at Raschig. He had his passport taken away by the Nazis, so that he was captive. When a letter came to tell him there was a baby on the way, he made my mother go to London to give birth so that the baby should get a British Passport. My grandfather gave up all his Rights at Raschig where he had been chief research Chemist for well over 25 years [ we have the bronze sculpture of a worker on an anvil which had been given him to commemorate that event]. While dismissing him as Chemist in Ludwigshafen they engaged him as Export Salesman on the other bank of the same river, in Mannheim, where he was not that well known. For that he required a passport – which he got. He fashioned a suitcase lock out of Platinum and both my grandparents then jumped ship in London. With that small suitcase he started again and was employed in Nottingham by the American Billiard Ball Company where his Leikorit was being used [more of this later].

They went to live in Haifa in a newly established area of Kiryat Bialik in the Haifa Bay where they bought a small bungalow and my mother's parents having got over the initial shock of the absurdity of that union, sent a "Lift" [ we would call it a Container today] with all the furniture needed for a cultured home, piano and all. In 1938 when I was 9 months old, they bought with my mothers money the

apartment in which I grew up. I do not know whether the old plaque is still fitted on the wall as you mounted the first three steps from Arlosorov Street and which read "Bayit Meshutaf Nof" = communally owned apartment house "Vista" – and what a vista we had!!

My first language was German. Hebrew only came when I started going to Kindergarten and then also elected to use my name David. It seems to have been a committee which decided my names. Clearly my grandparents must have had an input and my father was far away in Palestine. My birth certificate carries John [to be "English", must have been my grandparents influence!] Peter [my mother's preference, she called me that all her life] David – Jewish and Hebrew while later my passport, applied for by me reversed these names. Never ever have I used that ridiculous "John". It is interesting how the vast majority of us are uncomfortable with their "middle name". The reason for this is that you identify with your name. That middle name is not you – it often is there to commemorate some other person or event and in consequence you cannot identify with it. There was a rule laid down by my father - we do not mix languages. At home it was German, in Kindergarten, later school it was Hebrew. It went so far that I was always corrected if I "strayed" from these rules and I think it is here that I was taught to think in both languages. I was told that it went to the point when I was walking with my father I once said "Aba schau mal, ein Vogel, auch Zippor". So in conversation the languages really are interchangeable for me, but of course not in writing. My German writing is absolutely phonetic and I make endless grammatical and orthographic errors which, when speaking, one does not really hear. I have always explained that it was the language of my mother, if not my mother tongue. My English, on the other hand is absolutely fluent but with a distinct, if unrecognizable accent. I only need to wish someone "good morning" to instantly elicit the question "where do you come from". My Hebrew, on the other hand, is accent free, quite fluent, but devoid of



modern usage. I always rile against what I see as the bastardisation of the language. There is nowadays so much English in it! I will never forget arriving in Lod years ago and seeing a notice in Hebrew letters on the wall: "Diyutei Pri" Now I knew that "Diyut" has to do with poetry and Pri is fruit – but how on earth do these fit together?? When we got to the Machols in Kiryat Ono and they finally saw the light, they fell about laughing. The phrase on the wall was "Duty Free"! And so I have come to explain that in England I have to produce my passport to prove that I am British by birth. In Germany I must show the same passport to prove that I am not a German, (my German is also accent free) while in Israel, when I show my passport,

I am asked how much I had paid for it...

I would also like to point out here by way of a note that Hebrew had no swear words, Yes, you could call someone a donkey, you can say "Yimach Shim'cha" which means may your name be wiped out, but to properly swear we used borrowed words from all other languages, notably English, Russian and Arabic. That was probably the earliest example of the bastardisation of the language [though others would call it evolution].

In a way I was one of the generations which pioneered the widespread use of the Hebrew Language. I do not intend here to infer that I lived with Eliezer Ben Yehuda [1856 – 1952] who is seen as the father of reviving the language. But in my time they had a "Language Authority" or Committee which pontificated about the purity of the language and which set new words as new concepts arose and demanded expressions not yet available. It was a relatively easy task because Hebrew is a language based on 3-letter roots, with rules governing the formation of words. But it was we who spoke only Hebrew, thrived in its history, literature and culture and ensured that it really became part of the new nation which was so quickly absorbing remnants from across the world with little else in

common. The language even had special names for the first [Yore] and last [Malkosh] rains of the season, or the leading edge of a loaf of bread [leshika, from neshika – a kiss because in the oven the two loaves “kiss” each other when they are attached] – what a tremendous fusion of ancient and modern. Many of us refused to speak another language. Yiddish – more than any other of the languages – was frowned on most of all. It was the language of the Diaspora, of oppressed Judaism and we were the free, newly emerging nation. Yiddish would not pass our lips. In reality this attitude all but destroyed Yiddish and relegated its history and culture to the forgotten past. I find that I can follow it, because of my German and Hebrew. Yiddish combines the two with a peculiar pronunciation, plus of course Polish and all those other languages of the countries in which the Jews lived.

Thus it was that I was conceived in Palestine, born in England and brought up in what became Israel in 1948. My mother had both her brothers in England. Hans was a GP in London [he had studied medicine in Edinburgh], Maenne was a Research Chemist. I was born on Hampstead Heath in what was an extension of the London Clinic. By the time I was 2 months old we were back in Haifa. On the way my mother visited her parents in Germany. Only many years later, I was long since a parent myself, did I discover the significance of that visit. There is a picture of my grandparents holding my basket at the railway station. The picture is rather dark, except for the centre where the people and the basket are. We were looking at it one day and something made me pick up a magnifying glass. There, in the black of what I had taken to be the railway station ceiling is bunting made of Swastikas, hanging over three generations of Jews, all of whom would escape that murdering menace.



*Ludwigshafen railway station, Sept. 1937  
note the festooning Swastikas*

We returned to Palestine by ship. My mother travelled first class [ clearly my grandfather again used some of his wealth to pay for this ] and had a cabin adjacent to the Captain. On day 2 of the trip he demanded that she be moved because the screams of the baby kept him awake all night.... Apparently I always had a plaster across my navel to stop it from tearing as a result of the vehemence of my crying.

## 1939 – 1945 Second World War

No one who is Jewish and brought up in Palestine, can possibly fail to mention the war years as it appears in his memories. I was a baby really when it started. Haifa was a pivotal Centre of events in those days because it had both the harbour, the Rutenberg electricity generating plant [after Pinchas Rutenberg (1879 - 1942) Engineer and founder of the Palestine Electric Corporation (later the Israel Electric Corporation)] and the oil refinery – all prime targets for Italian planes which came over bearing bombs and machine guns. I certainly still remember having to go into the shelter when the sirens wailed. That piercing, wailing sound has always caused me to shudder. For us youngsters it was actually fun – a sleeping commune, but it was less so for our parents. All my adult life I abhorred fireworks. I do not know whether my children could understand this. The wailing of the Siren, coupled with powerful search lights which lit the skies and which attempted to hold an aircraft in the intersection of two such beams are impressions which never leave you. In 1948 another two sounds/sights were added: the shouts and boom of a mortar battery sending its explosives into the lower town and the sound and sight of fluorescent bullets on one trajectory into the lower town and the other trajectory into the upper town. Some of these bullets and shrapnel hit our concrete built apartment house and left pock marks for years thereafter. We kids collected all this metal waste, “best” were the pristine armaments which had not been fired.

I do not remember ever being afraid for myself, but probably I was for my father. He repeatedly was drafted in to carry British troops from Palestine to the North – Damascus, Baghdad and Beirut became places whose locations and names I knew well.



*My father is on the left*



*My father is second from the right*

Here is a typical example of memory-doubt. Is it the photographs, or better to say snapshots, in the album which tell me that it happened – or is it a real memory? There is also a photograph with me aged, I guess 6 or 7 marching next to my father in the Chever troupe on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May parade.



*"Chever" bus cooperative members at a 1<sup>st</sup> of May parade in Haifa*

## 1940

I was growing up in Haifa governed by England under a Mandate given it by the United Nations at the end of World War 1. It is really funny in a way. I remember as a child in the room where several mothers were talking to each other and someone saying that "Rachel was going out with an Englishman". It sounds totally innocuous now, but it was a real taboo under British Mandate conditions. A similar story exists about me, when I was about 3 years old. A group of mothers was gossiping about "going with an Englishman" - it included my mother and Aliza Bacharach, my pre-kindergarten nursery teacher - when her little daughter Nomi piped up: "what do you want, mine is also an Englishman". Nomi, who seems to have had a crush on me, knew that I had been born in London. We were 3 years old.

One of my earliest recollections is threading beads. There is somewhere a photograph of me, threading beads with my mother, but my memory is jogged by the photographic evidence depicting clearly how my father was working with me on this as well.



*Threading beads*

This all came back to me one day when I had finally decided to do some repair work on our Ndebele bead-work mats on which quite a number of threads were tearing. Using my hands to repair things has always been a great love. I was still very young when I began to find out how things functioned. The most vivid in my memory are my mother's sewing machine and the coffee grinder. My parents were out, I was on my own. My mother had this sewing machine on which she was making the most beautiful children's clothing. It could even do complicated stitches used to decorate as opposed to just holding two pieces of cloth together. Well, that afternoon I dismantled her machine – and had it reassembled and working again before they returned home. More or less at the same time I was accused of having damaged the coffee grinder because I had used it as a pencil sharpener and admitted to have done so. It was a cube of wood with a shiny rotating handle at the top and a sphere-segment which could be slid up or down to enable the insertion of the coffee beans. At the bottom it had a small drawer with a knob in the middle into which went whatever you had just ground. For years that grinder was exiled to the loft space and I had a guilty conscience about it because I had been accused of damaging it. Then one day, years later, I collected it from the loft and put some coffee beans into it. I was amazed – it worked, there was nothing wrong with it! True, a few bits of pencil timber still came out and the coffee was not fit for making a drink – but once this had worked itself through, the grinder was resurrected and I was exonerated. It was a good feeling to know that I had triumphed! – and my mother restarted her visits to Café Laro to buy those bitter beans....

My family laugh at me for never throwing anything away and trying to fix old equipment, rather than throw it out and buying new. I suppose that this is part of my upbringing in Israel, where we simply were not able to go and buy new. The whole concept of throwing things out and buying replacement is something with which I have never been



able to reconcile myself. The throw-away society is largely the result of poor manufacturing and is the source of much waste and pollution of our environment. It is symptomatic of greed and the idiotic economical theory which always demands that this year one makes more than one did last year. This is equally true when it comes to food, where I have this strong urge to finish before starting the new. For example: a started loaf, before being entitled to start a fresh one, even if the fresh one is still warm and much more appetising. Warm loaves have always been a great attraction to me. A memory has just come back, where I am sent by my mother across the road to buy a loaf of bread and invariably returning home with a fair amount missing at the front end, which had to be "straightened" out.

That grocery shop ran a credit tab for many of its customers. We were all, of course, known personally to the shopkeeper. My mother would never take credit. We had no tab. Everything had to be paid for – else gone without.

Our apartment in Haifa was "enormous" – we had 3 good sized rooms, a kitchen, bathroom and a separate toilet. We had a superb view over the harbour. We also had three balconies. In theory it was a bedroom for my parents, one for me and a lounge. After my father's departure, often the third room was sublet, to give my mother some income as there was no maintenance money from my father. The bath water was heated by a wood burning stove beneath a cylindrical water container at the end of the bath. There was, of course, no central heating or cooling of the apartment in those days other than by means of electric [expensive!] or paraffin heaters. Wood came from the hillside and was therefore cheap.



*Typical paraffin heater*

Cooking .... We were “wealthy” – we owned an electric cooker which had come from Germany with the rest of the household in 1936. But the bulk of cooking was done using the Primus stove and the Ptilia. I guess these deserve an explanation.

Primus was the brand name of a paraffin oil-burning stove. It gave its name generically to all such cookers and excellent it really was. A brass cylindrical container held the paraffin which was burned. At the side was a hand-operated pump, rather like a built-in bicycle pump. The plunger had a leather washer which sealed against the sides when pushing in, thus pumping air in to create a pressure which propelled the fuel to the head where it ignited. That was probably where I first learned the rudiments of maintenance. Every now and again that assembly had to be unscrewed and the washer flattened a

little, so that it fitted more snugly and did not allow the air to escape as you were pumping. Up the centre of the stove was a small tube which conducted the compressed paraffin to the head. But paraffin does not ignite easily, it has to be heated first so that it evaporates and for that purpose there was a dish concentric to the tube which carried the paraffin, into which methylated Spirits were poured and ignited to burn with a mauve coloured flame which heated the ignition head. Only when that nearly burned out was the pump used to push up the paraffin in order to ignite at the pre-heated head. How often did we have to clean those heads! There was a special implement, a flat bit of tin-metal with a fine wire at the front which was used to poke into the nozzle where the paraffin emerged. Equally the perforated ignition heads where the flame was to burn with a mauve coloured flame – avoid yellow – it causes soot! – had to be cleaned regularly, especially when some pot had spilled during the cooking process, milk boiled over, an egg had cracked and whatever else... Ours was a particularly good example of that cooker – it had an additional rotating handle which adjusted the supply of paraffin and determined how strong the cooking flame was. These were dangerous pieces of equipment, occasionally one would explode, often they were overturned when being pumped up, especially when the meths was already burning.



*Primus stove*

The Ptilia was another story... It was, in the main, a slow cooker. The Deluxe version had two flames. Wicks of 2" or 2.5" were hanging into paraffin and candlewick-like conveyed the oil to where the flame burnt it. There was an adjustment wheel which lifted or lowered the wick and this had to be set just right! Too little and the flame went out. Too much and it burnt yellow causing masses of soot to be deposited on the pots and the kitchen ceiling.



*Ptilia*

There was also a loft in the flat, reached through a trap door outside the toilet and bathroom. We had no ladder and I was very proud when I was finally big enough to get there on my own. Nothing of any value was ever stored there – as we could not reach it. I do remember, however, that it became the resting place of my Meccano set and the train set. These eventually both vanished, I have no idea when or to whom....

Our Michael and Nina have just spent a year in Malawi. Our Daniel has spent his youth in Romania – my guess is that they are the ones who can feel the best what it was like to live happily – and without material things. We were “rich” because the furniture came from Germany and so we also had a refrigerator. But the bulk of the population went out daily to a, at first horse drawn, later motorised flat-backed vehicle which called door to door and collected ice

blocks which were already melting under the tarpaulins. These came in 1.5 meter lengths, about 30 cm square section and were cut with a sharp pointed implement rather like a ground-down screwdriver. To pick up the ice the man had a scissor-like tool with a chain between the handles which, when lifted, closed the prongs at the other end onto the ice and gripped it. It was an art to get the balance right, so that the block remained horizontal!



*Ice vendor*

Another door to door salesman at that time was the milkman, though he was a Jew, not an Arab. Horse and cart with milk urns waiting outside the house. I saw a picture of this again many years later in Topol's performance of "Fiddler on the Roof". He transferred the milk from the big urn to this smaller urn, which he carried in one hand and in the other he had a 1-litre small container with a handle. Ima would appear at the door with her pot ready and the milkman's arm holding the little container would disappear into the urn, at times all the way to his shoulder, to emerge with milk overflowing from the litre can.

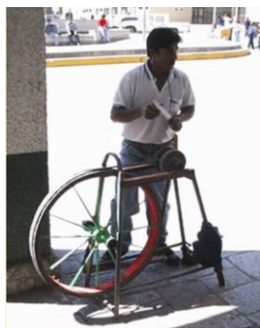
Ima, of course, shuddered at the lack of hygiene, but there it was, that was how it was done.

Paraffin was also sold door to door – only this had the large container on the cart and a valve could be turned to dispense a quantity into the can we brought out for this purpose.



*Paraffin [Kerosene] vendor*

Other street vendors toured the town – the scrap iron man ringing his piercing bells. They all liked to stop outside our house particularly because there was a large area of tarmac in that bend which the moving traffic did not need to use as it did the sweep up the hill and so parking was easy, clients could gather around the carts. It was rather like having a village oasis in the city. A regular visitor was the man who sharpened all manner of knives and scissors – on what was basically an adapted bicycle.



*Entrepreneur knives sharpener*

Shopping for food was spread into two parts – across the street from us was a grocery store where we bought whatever was needed immediately – but that was more expensive than going to the market in Hechaluz Street - a big, roofed over structure in which the vendors displayed their goods – typical of a Middle Eastern market. Also fish was bought there, I remember mainly Carp. The difference to our practices today was that in order to ensure that they were fresh they were sold live – kept in our bath until needed and then hit over the head to be killed. Not exactly humane but no one really thought in terms of cruelty to these creatures. Chicken, too were often alive until bought. I could, today, still clean out both fish and chicken and de-scale/de-feather them. Chicken stubbles left behind were burnt over the open flame of the Primus stove. The milt was squeezed through a piece of muslin cloth and fed to the aquarium fish which absolutely swarmed when they got a whiff of this. In the early days, particularly when it was hot, we had to sleep under mosquito nets which were sprayed with water in order to make breathing possible. There was abundant use of DDT to deter insects. The knowledge that it was dangerous to health and deadly to birds and plants came only much, much later. Moths too were a big problem. They would lay their eggs among our clothing and blankets and the larvae then feasted on the textile. The smell of those balls of chemicals was horrible!. The worst time was during the Chamseen – An Arabic word meaning 50. That was a hot wind blowing from the desert and apparently occurred on 50 days of the year. [ 1 in 7 days seems rather a lot, though so I don't believe it really blows that often ]. In southern Germany there is a warm wind known as the "Foehn". I remember HJ Boehm (of whom more later) telling me that it made people very nervous and anyone who committed murder during such a period was dealt with much more leniently than otherwise. The same should have been true for the Chamseen as well. [ It seems that that is the case in Arab countries.] Later on the importance of the food market fell away, though I believe it still exists. There were very many shops

– invariably small ones – Department Stores were few and far between, though Chefzi-ba on Herzl Street was an exception.

I have been trying to think of whether I was ever aware of crime in Haifa. With a very small number of exceptions, I cannot. We certainly felt safe, you could walk the streets anywhere and at any time [war excepting]. One incident remains with me, however. A butcher, across the street from the Chefzi-ba was caught selling camel meat which was forbidden, I do not know why, but it was. He had made a great deal of money selling this meat and had bought himself a luxurious car. Hence the question went around the German Jewish population: “how does one convert a camel into a Jaguar”?

My father who was a bus driver (at a time when the front screen of the buses was still divided into two, with a wooden post separating the two halves) was learning English. Each day he prepared a list of 10 words and pinned it onto this timber-window-divide. He did remarkably well in the language! he was working as a member in the bus cooperative, which gave him real status among the working population. I guess nowadays no one would thinking of this job as a remarkable one..

There is a nice story attached: When my mother wrote to say that she met the man of her future and that he was a driver working in the bus cooperative, my grandparents in Germany were mortified. They were academics, grandfather a research chemist, grandmother the daughter of the Rabbi of Freiburg. The fact was that one needed to have contributed a sizable chunk of money (either half, or a whole cost of a bus, I am not sure which) AND more to the point - one had a permanent, secure job in unemployed Palestine. So, when my grandfather told a close academic friend whose opinions he valued and who understood the Palestine background better, of the calamity that his



daughter had proposed to marry a bus driver, the friend responded with "oh! ein Chauffeur!!!!"

A blessing was then transmitted from my grandparents BUT on condition that the couple first had a medical check-up to show that there was no impediment to the union. To this day I have not learned what such a medical test involves. I believe that somewhere in North America this is still the case, a requirement of the State??

## 1943

Palestine was a country central to several religious groups. The strange thing is that the non-Jews had an urge to convert people to their own belief. I have never understood this need, but there was one occasion when I definitely took advantage of it. A Missionary shop existed in Haifa. They offered rather nice food for the hungry and more importantly, they gave out for free copies of the Bible printed in Hebrew on the most wonderful thin paper – a quality far superior to anything which we were able to obtain in those days. Strangely and I only learned this many years later, one of the missionaries was a Mr Plotke, a Jew who had himself converted to Christianity and was the uncle of Hanna Klein who was to marry my uncle Maenne after the war had ended. I recall nothing at all about being in any way enticed to convert. I do recall that once I had obtained that coveted book, I never again returned to the missionary shop.

As a small child I was able to tell the make of the bus from the sound of its horn. Haifa was a small town. Most adults used to know everyone else. Certainly all the bus drivers knew each other and their families and kids. I was entitled to go on the buses for free – even hail a bus away from the bus stop. My father, in attempting to make the work of the driver more efficient invented the cash dispensing machine still seen today and almost universally applied. All the coins are dropped into a funnel, are separated by their size and stacked in individual metal tubes. To dispense them, levers are depressed which release a coin for each depression of the levers.

As a bus driver my father would work a particular route and we knew where and when he would be at certain points along this. So, from time to time I would meet him and hand over his lunch box with sandwiches and a drink. At times I was allowed to accompany him on the bus. Can

you imagine this today? I would stand to his left, away from the entrance door. In those days there was no such thing yet as a light indicating a wish to turn. A driver would stick his hand out of the window and hold it there to show he was turning left, or do a circular motion to show the intention to turn right. Up-and-down indicated "I am slowing down". On the buses they had a long direction indicating board which was operated by means of a lever from the inside. I was allowed to operate this when my father gave me the instruction to do so. Later I was even allowed to anticipate the need for that operation. Occasionally I would also stand to his right and be allowed to open and close the door – again a lever-operated mechanism. That was quite a responsibility considering that often there was a crush of people who wanted to enter the bus and who refused to step out again if the bus was too full. The public was fairly unruly. There were notices in each bus saying things such as "it is forbidden to speak to the driver when the bus is in motion" and "Do not smoke and do not spit". Queuing was something invented by the British and not really in vogue in their Palestine mandate.

I was still very young – my father was still at home – and he would smoke a cigarette. One day I said that I too wanted to do so. OK, he said and gave me a cigarette and held the match for me. I gave a tiny suck and puffed out the smoke – as pleased as punch I was. "Not like this" said my father, "if you want to smoke, you might as well do it properly. Smokers do not collect the smoke in their mouth, they draw it in deeply into their lungs, look, like this" and with this he demonstrated the correct art of smoking a cigarette. Well, I followed suit and coughed my lungs out. My eyes watered and I thought I was – I do not know what I actually thought. But one thing I do know – it was many years before I again attempted to smoke. By then I was in Whittingehame College and there was unquestionable peer pressure. I am not trying to make excuses, but I was clearly trying to be adult in a situation where I was suddenly two years behind because of language problems.

I smoked quite heavily for about 15 years. No amount of pressure from my mother and later my wife helped. There was no Lung Cancer scare yet in those days and without a doubt I had an addiction. I never had an answer to the question “why did you light this one just now, why not in 5 minutes from now”. It stopped only when Danielle was on the way. Suddenly it was not just my health that was at risk, but I had the responsibility of another life which we had created. I stopped from one day to the next and never touched a cigarette again. There is no craving. I dislike smelling that other people smoke – one of the few smells my nose does tell me about.

I remember my father teaching me other, practical things. The use of a hammer to straighten out a bent nail – you hold it preferably by the sharp end so that the curve is upwards and hammer onto the top of the curve – but avoid the fingers! How to mend a fuse and so many other practical things. I also learned from him some important lessons for driving such as always checking your brakes after traversing a puddle of water in order to dry out the brake linings, never to rev up the engine and to use as high a gear as possible when going through mud in order to avoid wheels spinning or vehicle sliding sideways. This also necessitated the turning of the steering wheel into a side slide – all very useful also on the ice and snows in Europe. He made sure that all buses were brought to a complete stop before a railway crossing and not to rely on automated signals, after a dreadful accident on one of the Haifa roads. He also taught me to depress the clutch and to rev up the engine when one needed to move cows off the road – I have often used this to good effect on the road where too many people used the path I wanted to traverse. My father was a very practical and logical person and I guess I have inherited these traits from him.

I think it must have been in this period too that I learned about the pie-chart - one of the few things I clearly remember learning from him. I had complained that I never

had enough time and always was called to do my homework. He sat me down and asked me to list all the things I wanted to do and the length of time to be allocated for each, including sleeping, eating, working and playing. Then I had to decide in which part of the day these activities were to take place and a pie chart was drawn with the items I had created myself. No one was more amazed than I when I suddenly saw how much time I had for everything!

We were walking the hills above Loch Lomond where we have a Time Share – week 22 of each year and I was lacing up my new walking boots. They have a number of steel hooks under which the boot laces are held, rather than having to thread them through holes. Suddenly a memory flashed through my brain – it must be a very early one... It was my father who had from Germany a pair of very tall boots – riding boots?? Motorcycle boots? It must have been the latter. I do not believe my father was ever in a position where horses were ridden. With just such hooks, but not just a few – his boots had them the whole way up. I remembered being shown how one laces up such boots, - hold both ends of the shoe lace in one hand and hook them in parallel under the next available two hooks, then pull the laces in parallel to the other side of the boot and repeat hooking them under the next available hooks – and so the whole way up. In the end, only one of the lace ends had still to be taken across and hooked under the last one of those hooks before tying them up. Then I learned how to do that knot, so that it had 2 equal loops and the ends did not pull through. Oh no! that would mean there was only one loop! Strange how this memory was there, fleetingly. I must have been quite young because my father left my home when I was 9 and you learn to tie up shoe laces much earlier...

My mother was so super clean, she always boiled everything. Bread, in those days, arrived open - there was no paper for wrapping, let alone a plastic bag. Each loaf

had a label glued onto it with the name of the bakery – a source of much shuddering on Ima's behalf, what glue could they have used and who had touched it??? - and had to be cut away! At most there would be a 4" x 4" piece of paper, brown or grey, held diamond-shaped so that your fingers did not actually touch the warm crust. When I brought that bread home, each loaf was always held over a naked flame and singed. That way she ensured that the bread we ate was clean. I remember often, going home from the shop with the loaf under my armpit, pulling off a little bit that was protruding from the hot, fresh loaf (and often ending up by the time I got home, with a cave where the end of the loaf used to be). I think I occasionally wondered whether I was right to do this NOT because I should bring a whole loaf home, but because it had not yet been burned off. My mother was described as the woman who even boiled the lettuce off to clean it. The result was that she ended up in hospital with typhus and nearly died. She had no resistance. I was looked after and stayed with the de Levie's at 14 Masada Street. I always described Hertl as the nearest thing I could have had to having a second mother. Daniel & Hertl came as refugees from Germany as my parents had done. Their son was Aryeh with whom I often played. Our mothers dressed us in the same clothes, you might have thought that we were brothers, he being 18 months older than I. We were also often photographed together, in similar clothing and frequently by the photographer Julian Fuerst.



*Little me & Ari de Levie 1943.*

For some reason he also liked photographing us in the nude, even still when I was 13 years old, though I remember distinctly objecting to it by then.. This would today raise considerable eyebrows, but certainly not at that time. Daniel also worked for Chever, the bus cooperative. It was in Masada Street that I learned eating around a table, together as a family. You NEVER started to eat without all linking hands and saying "Mahlzeit, Mahlzeit, Mahlzeit" as the hands waved up and down with the rhythm of the pronouncement. There was always an ironed and starched white tablecloth, often with colourful flower embroidery. Here I did a lot of paper cutting and pasting, Hertl always had an endless list of things in response to our "what can I do now"? It was here therefore that I learned to put things to paper and create drawings, decorate cut-out paper shapes. It was here that I learned that there was a Wolf in the Red Riding Hood story, "tell of the wolf" I demanded from my mother when she finally came back from the Bat Galim Government Hospital where she had nearly lost her life. It was Hertl who pushed soap into our mouths after a threat to do so and when nevertheless we continued our happy and jovial noise. Ari was much better than I at climbing up the door frame. It was she who made the best Senfgurken [ cucumbers pickled in a mustard sauce] in the world after which I still hanker today from

time to time. In fact the story goes – often retold by my mother – that my mother went into Hertl's kitchen with a typewriter before marrying my father and instructing her "teach me to cook". I still possess that typewriter, I think.

Years later Hertl committed suicide in the Kinneret. I once visited her from England and we had together made a trip to the Galil which she loved so much. I remember standing with her on an observation tower, with forest all around and she with a calm and beautiful smile looking into the distance.



*I think this is where I learned to mourn, Hertl's last lesson for me.*

I intersperse here a piece which I wrote some time ago and which has been dormant in my computer for years.

## ***Death***

*I wonder whether I can put down on screen my thoughts and feelings about death? I have been asking myself "Ma nishtana" - how was yesterday's death (7 astronauts on Columbia) so different from*



so many other deaths which occur all the time, every single day and minute. After all, there is nothing that is alive that will not die and yet human beings are totally unprepared for it, or so it appears. Why is it that the sudden disappearance of this group has such a totally different reaction in the population when compared with accidents and death that occur daily somewhere else. When we were being shown on TV the first missions to the unknown, I always watched in wonderment. I also watched the vanishing interest in people as these flights became "mundane" - though I have continued to thirst for these reports and it seems unlike the rest of humanity, have never lost the wish to follow, even got angry at "the powers that be" for no longer bothering to show us the amazing NASA "routines". How dare "humanity" become so blasé about these exploits? Now I am moved to ask "how dare humanity suddenly make such a "thing" about this tragedy? They were not interested when they departed, suddenly they are all wailing because the group did not come back! And again - why is it that the only one pulled out of that group (at least at the start, as the reports first came in) was the Israeli among them. Did, at the point of death, really only this one man have a name? Why did they allow the others to remain anonymous for several hours? Did the Indian and American parents not grieve in the exact, identical, way? And did it matter that one was black among them? - and yet it did! I feel really angry that TV and "media" have the temerity to tell us that "no one is interested any longer and therefore we are not screening these events" and in contrast, when they attack the failings of some inconsequential human beings, they dissect every bit of minutiae they can think of in an almost Talmudic way.

*At the same time I find that there is something really enviable that America has. There is such an immense unifying force in that Giant America which shouts out in these moments of grief "we are so strong, nothing will defeat us - the programme will go on". Still more I admire the way NASA really has SHARED the knowledge and secrets of space exploration and has enabled strangers from inner space - a euphemism for people with different coloured passports and other sounding languages - to be part of the team. I have always found that to be really amazing.*

*Having raved "how dare they" a few lines back, I salute the need in the nation to lower the flag to half mast. What I was really saying is that I, to equate and balance these feelings – I would want the nation to raise their flags to full mast on each occasion when one of these missions is under way.*

*I cannot accept our right to ignore these feats - whether they are manned or unmanned.*

*Death, in general, seems – and I am not at all sure how I will react to the real thing happening close by in this way - to be something of which I have no fear at all. In my mind I equate it to going to sleep.*

*When I do go to sleep, I never consider whether I will, or will not wake up. So, I guess, if I do not wake up, I will just go on sleeping. There seems nothing more to it.*

*I quite often pose the question: "how many people have you known at some time in your life, people who were really close and important to you at that time and then, through some combination of events, you drifted apart and never heard from them again"? We all have hundreds of such people, I*

certainly do. Well, if I consider these "at one-time close" individuals, who presumably today exist somewhere on this earth but are totally separated from me, then from MY POINT OF VIEW these people may as well be dead. That is exactly how I imagine "death" and why it is an event which I feel ought not to be so traumatic and dramatized as it is. The fact that we drifted away from these people who at one time were so important to us does not in any way mean that we have forgotten them, lost our admiration for them, continue to practice what we learned from them, think of them - some more, some less. But in real terms if you can imagine in life an equivalent to "relative motion", in real terms our "relative lifenesses" (if I may coin such a word) have ceased and for all I know, they are dead.

With that point of view grief becomes unnecessary - almost. When my mother died, I do not think that I did what people call "grieve". Yes - I was sad. I was amazed at how often I thought of her, quoted her - I still do to this day - I regretted some things I did not ask or straighten out - but I did not cry and beat my breast. I think it is wrong that our civilization does not teach us from the start that all things alive die and that is the absolute natural way of being and ceasing to be and therefore totally acceptable. I even see in crying and mourning a selfish act - I think that those who mourn do so because they are left behind without the person who has just departed - so they cry for themselves, their own hurt, they do not cry for the one who could have enjoyed life a little longer. (did I once say that I will never accept a generality?? Where is that now?). People who die suddenly are just such people, they could have enjoyed their lives a little longer, - even when they are more than a hundred years old, THEY may feel that they have not done living yet and so to some people death comes too soon. Others feel that they

*do not want to go on. They have had enough for whatever reason and our society has the cheek to tell them they have to carry on - whatever the pain and personal suffering.*

*So life and death are now turning into something that belongs strictly and totally to the individual experiencing it and not to others who are near - or far away - to them.*

*All this is a philosophy in which I feel I am very different to those close to me. I have never met anyone else to whom I tried to explain this and who has agreed with me. I see no importance to life and death save that importance of how the individual experiences it. If the individual manages to pass from one state to the other in an orderly fashion and without physical pain, I almost envy them. If they manage to pass away having succeeded in being noticed in a positive way, influenced some others around them, brought knowledge and comfort to some around them and were content in - or able to accept - the way they have lived their lives - they are the lucky ones and presumably able to equally accept or be content - in the way they have died.*

*I guess that brings me back to yesterday. Each of the 7 was mid stream. To me, although they were total strangers, they brought marvel in what they were doing. I hope they were content in their lives and I do not know whether they were ready to stop living. I know I will think of them from time to time. So, just in the same way as I say of those people who were an influence on me and have drifted away, that from my point of view of "relative lifeness" "they may as well be dead", the seven yesterday "may as well be alive".*

*You will tell me that I am being "an engineer", though I think that you will not say "a typical engineer".*

*I would like my body to go to medicine, as did my mother with hers. Cemeteries are vital for genealogies – but I see no point in them. They are more frequently than not a source of a guilty conscience to the survivors.*

**Addendum on death:** *It is now the last day of 2006. Syl is planning a combined party for 14<sup>th</sup> July – Michael's wedding-non-invitees and my 70<sup>th</sup>. It feels weird that I am heading for 70, for the first time the reality of old age is actually staring me in the face. Bit by bit the body confirms it – twice the prostate cancer, a heart attacks(?), one by one these are signs that we are no longer young. We have started to lose friends from Bnai Brith – death is beginning to (almost routinely) remind us of its existence. Do I feel any different about it? I am convinced the answer is "no". I AM afraid of physical pain, of the loneliness for the survivor – but not of death itself. Morphine permitting (and at the moment England has an acute shortage of di-morphine, whatever the difference may be ) they will deal with the pain, so for me only the pain of the survivor remains to be feared. Whether I fear for Syl – or for myself I do not know, but that is the only fear I experience. Death itself remains an inevitability, a going to permanent sleep, a "not being here any longer" a "dark hole" – a permanent non existence.*

There had been several years in which my mother and Hertl did not speak. I never found out what their quarrel had been, but I did learn from it that my mother suffered the pain of separation terribly. It had something to do with my father. Both Daniel and my father were in the cooperative Management at that time. The women came together again

after he left...Masada Street had a water tower at its start and ran relatively horizontally along its entire length – as did Hillel Street above it. It was in those streets that I often went roller skating. Come to think of it, I cannot remember when it was that I got my roller skates. They cost a fortune. They were strapped to your shoes and came off from time to time. No integral shoe/wheels in those days....

On my first day at school – Huggim School in Pevsner Street – [named after the Zionist Bella Pevsner, who founded the Council of Jewish Women - a Zionist organisation which was also active on a range of women's issues, both Jewish and non-Jewish] Hertl replaced her traditional gift of a large paper cone filled with sweets with a complete hunk of bananas. She knew my dislike of sweets and love for bananas, although in this volume it did put me off bananas for a long time. I rarely ate any sweet substances [other than Halva, of course]. Aba pointed out to me the corner cupboard and told me that whenever I wanted a sweet, I could just go and help myself from there, if there were any, that is. It was war time, these things were rationed. I never did, at least I do not remember ever doing so.

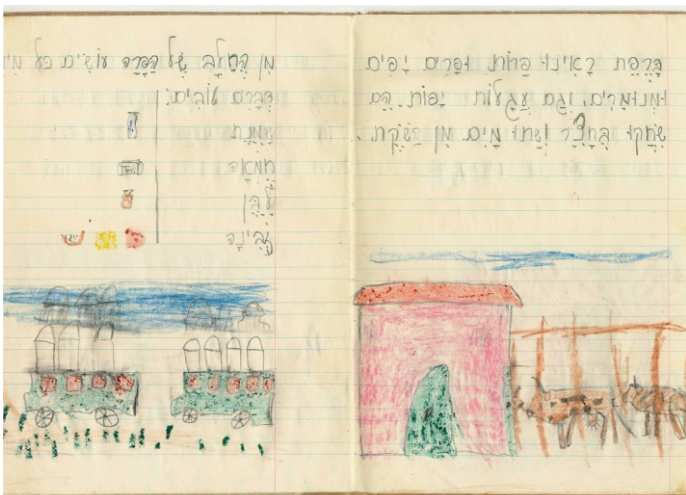


*Day 1 at school*

Huggim School was one of the two privately run schools in Haifa. The other was the "Re'ali" whom I always admired for the only thing I knew about them – they had a Motto – "ve'haz'na lechet" = a very flowery form of "tread in modesty" or "walk humbly". It was stitched beneath the school emblem which they wore on their white shirt. For some reason I thought our school was inferior for not having this, though the debate about a uniform often raged and we were adamant that it was an expense not fair on some parents. Here was a large concrete yard, we were flanked by a few trees. Later the school would move to larger premises on the Carmel. School started at 8am from your 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. Later and for a relatively short time, two parallel streams were run, one in the morning the other in the afternoon, because so many of our teachers were called for military duty during the war of independence. We had none of the niceties of European schools – no tennis court, swimming pools or football grounds. There were some private facilities and for a while I loved going to fencing classes. We knew the teachers by their first name, as they us. It was, of course, a co-educational system and you started school at the age of 6. Wooden chairs and tables, a blackboard. Nothing fancy at all, certainly not in comparison to what I was to get to learn and be confronted with at age 15. Pevsner Street was within walking distance of home.



*This is not my actual class, but very typical*



*We got only half the exercise books until we could write properly, then*



*complete ones – which always had to be wrapped in brown paper. That is where I learned wrapping, with sharp edges and corners tucked away. Pencils had to be used to their very stub and so we had extenders when the pencil was too short to hold.*

Our educational curriculum was really first class. Irrespective of whether it was the Sciences or the Arts , we were given a wide perspective , were made to understand the material in depth. I know this to be the case because when, eventually I took the O-Level General Certificate of Education in England I passed so many of the subjects because of what I had been taught in Haifa – not in Brighton. So much of what we did in class was practical. In History we drew maps and charts, in Zoology we dissected worms and frogs, in Arabic we had conversation sessions, in Hebrew and Bible lessons we performed plays and several times a year we went on class outings, somewhere in the hills or the sea shore. It did not matter that we did not have books for every part of our studies. In the absence of Atlases, we traced and coloured in our own maps – and we certainly learned Geography that way – and realised how tiny our huge Israel was.



*Tracing from a Hebrew atlas*

I remember one particular trip, to the Tel Aviv Zoo. This was particularly memorable for several reasons. Firstly, Tel Aviv was quite far from Haifa and we went there by train from Haifa Station. It was the first time I had been on a train apart from the trip to Cairo. I had a relatively new camera and some of those old snapshots of classmates at the zoo are still in my picture album. But above all I learned on that trip what a parabola was. There was that old lion who happened to need to relieve himself and I got the full force of that stream at the other end – and our teacher took that as an opportune moment to explain the name of that trajectory! At times we were also given civil duties. We “made history” when it was decided that from the older children in the down-town school a few would be selected to man the crossing of the street at a designated crossing point – known in England as “Lollipop people”. I was one of them. In ironed khaki shorts and white shirt, with a specially issued recognition band on the right sleeve we were allowed to stop the traffic when a group of children had collected and wanted to cross. The local newspaper printed a cartoon when that scheme started, showing such a group at one side of the road and the Lollipop youngster saying to them “wait, there is no car at the moment, do not cross yet”. There was cohesion in the classroom that I have never felt again anywhere. Without doubt that was the advantage of a private, well managed school.

I learned something else that was important. Naturally our class also absorbed a number of newly arrived immigrant children, who had survived the Holocaust. Not only did they not know Hebrew at first but also they were radically different – they did not know how to play either. There was a haunted look in their eyes which we called “Diaspora”. We of course did not understand the depths of the horrors they had seen. It was not unusual for one of them to burst out crying in the middle of a lesson, for absolutely no visible reason. It was from these children that I learned that I will never understand a survivor and that I will never be in a position to judge them or their actions. One of these

children was Shmuel Huppert known by his parents and friends as Tommy. His parents had arrived in Palestine in 1933 from Czechoslovakia. His father had a hand-bag shop on Pevzner Street. In late 1938 Shmuel's mother took him to Hungary to visit her parents and they were caught up there by the war, interned for a long time in Buchenwald, but also in other camps. The father knew nothing of their whereabouts for the whole duration of that war. Their survival was a miracle, in no small part brought about by the constant care and devotion of his mother. I, of course, lost touch with Shmuel after I left Israel. Many years later, Sylvia and I were visiting Israel with our young girls. I was ill in the hotel room and the women went out to sightsee. It was Memorial Day, the day the Holocaust is remembered in Israel. With nothing better to do I was listening to the radio and there came a broadcast entitled "My mother gave birth to me a second time" by Shmuel. He related their survival and paid tribute to his mother. I went mad. I HAD to find him, to make contact - only on such a holiday no one can be found, no office is staffed. I racked my brain and thumbed the phone book - and eventually found an entry for Simcha Pops, another class mate. [Simcha's father died when we were about 10 years old. He told me years later how grateful he was to me for the help and support I had given him at the time - he and his mother often visited our home for a meal, but I remember none of that, other than the death itself. Another such early death was that of the father of Zvi Ben-Yishai. His mother continued to manage their shop selling paints and here I do remember going quite frequently to the shop to try to help her]. Anyway, I found Simcha on the phone. When I explained to him in which hotel I was, his response was "if you look out of your window and spit, you will probably hit me". That was an incredible and emotional reunion. I had not seen Simcha since I was 15. In my mind's eye he was still that boy - and I was somewhat startled to be confronted by a fat, bald bouncy old man. Only his smile was still the same. He - not I - related how when his father died, Ima had invited them into our home and tried to alleviate some of the shock

of losing the head of their household. I saw him as far more successful than I was. He had an amazingly stable base in his homeland and “belonged”. Like me, he had a wife and children, but was far more advanced in his ability to provide for them [not that I had done badly!] He was on the “edge of politics” and had been politically appointed to become the Managing Director for Investment in Israel. With pride he showed me two newspaper articles, the one castigating him for building too many hotels in Eilat and the other, some years later, castigated him for not building enough of these. At the time when we met he had relinquished that position because the Right Wing parties were now in power and his appointment would have been terminated in any case. He continued to act as an advisor for tourism in a private capacity. I hoped that I would be able to act as a sort of buying house for some of his projects, but that never came about. Sadly, his excessive weight brought about tremendous health problems including the need for a kidney transplant, apparently procured in India... One of the stories Simcha related concerned our school class – a large group of whom joined the army in a Kibbutz/Military combination which enabled them to lead useful lives on the farm and not just “waste their time” being soldiers in times when there was no war. He also related how the group, who were all in the paratroops and all attended officers’ courses decided to obtain exactly 0% in an examination which was based on the Multiple Choice system. Their Regimental Sergeant Major was appalled that they all got 0% when he knew them to be a bright bunch and marched them before the commanding officer. He, in turn, recognized how well they evidently knew the material to be able to balance the marks so accurately and dismissed the charges against them. It turned out that the Pops’s and the Hupperts were best friends and always together. Shmuel had blossomed to become the head of the Israel Broadcasting Corporation’s Literary section. On one occasion the Pops’s and Hupperts invited us for a picnic in the hills around Jerusalem where we learned of the reality of their lives.

The men had revolvers around their waists, the women carried the ammunition. Another Huggim classmate, Zvi called "Bukki", has been for many years the deputy of Rambam Hospital.

School imbibed a love in us for all that we were taught – from the very early days aged 6 when we had exercise books with two narrow lines and two wide ones astride these so that we learned the limitations of the letters both for Hebrew and Latin characters. I learned to love reading and titles such as "the Last of the Mohicans", "Tom Sawyer" "The Black Hand" "Emil & the Detectives" "Robinson Crusoe" come to mind. At all times we felt "adult" and in a way we were, much sooner than my own children were, driven in the main by the responsibilities we all carried and that permanent state of War. We were naughty too from time to time – of course. Our English teacher [ "lucky are girls with curls" she taught us at one time... ] had a boyfriend who had a Fiat Topolino and regularly collected her from school. It was great fun for a small group of us to collect at the rear of this very small car and to lift up the back axle so that when he revved up to leave, they remained stationary in our hands. At one time we let off a stink bomb in the class, but here Eliyahu was cleverer than us – he left the room and locked the door, leaving us to stew in the stink we had created.

I remember Eliyahu once getting angry with two boys - Eitan Kestenbaum and Ran Vash. He will always remain in my memory! He gave them each a punishment – "write your name 100 times".

"Not fair!" cried Eitan.

"Why?" asked the teacher,

"He is Ran Vash:- reish, nun, vav, shin - just four letters.

My name is Eitan Kestenbaum!"

The only one where there were absolutely no pranks was Michael Dana, our Arabic Teacher. Him we feared. I no

longer remember why – only that we did. Famous in my household became Yaskil – our art teacher. He really was an artist. He had a semi circular pair of glasses for reading and would look above them for distant vision. He had a mop of white hair, rather like Ben Gurion and when angered he would hiss. At one time we had a chameleon in a glass [waterless] aquarium kept as part of our zoology course. It would hiss when you tapped the glass and soon it was nicknamed “Yaskil”. I did not like art and so regularly on Thursday afternoons had a crepe bandage wound around my right wrist – so that obviously I could not draw. However, for the end of term marks Yaskil had a very simple method of allocating attainment marks – we each displayed our term’s work on our desk and he moved from one to the next, making comments and allocating marks. He came to me, stood in front of my desk and asked, “is this your work?” “Yes” I lied and he dived down and having peered through these half glasses at my display said “rarely have I seen anyone draw with such varying styles” and then after a closer look at the corner of one of these drawings looked at me again and said “I did not know your name was Rutti” .... He was, rightly, incensed and typically, hissed that I was to get the very worst possible mark “insufficient”. But that was not enough. The following day he appeared in my father’s shop in Neve Sha’an an and in front of all the customers bawled him out about the behaviour of his son...

Years later, at a parents-teachers meeting evening I told this story to my daughter’s art teacher. She was so convinced, but totally wrongly, that I was actively discouraging my daughter from painting, that she took her under her wing specially, with beautiful results for our child. So some good came out of my art history after all.

Another huge difference in the school environment between Israel and England came with songs. I have never got over the feelings that in England no one sings. I do not pretend that England does not have its music

industry, but I do feel that it does not sing. Wales does – but only in choirs.

I never knew that my “Israeli” songs were initially Russian music with Hebrew words. Some German songs came from my mother as lullabies, then in Kindergarten with sweet rhymes and tunes about life as seen by the child and then about our homeland as Zionism, Socialism and all the other weird isms were put to words and music. No group of kids went in a bus on a trip without singing. When you walked in the hills – you sang. When there was a get-together on the hillside, often to the glow of a camp fire with potatoes being cooked in the embers we sang. Singing was an integral part of our group life. I am speaking of folk songs, not pop music. I do not pretend that Israel today does not have the same sounds of music which you can hear anywhere else in the world. We sang about building our homeland, about the longing for peace, about creating a better place for all – and always with that minor key sound of poignancy. I often think of that song describing the little boy who has just told his mother how he had given Nurit a flower and an apple. Nurit ate the apple, threw the flower into the yard and then went to play with another boy. In the refrain the boy asks his mother “I am not a cry-baby, I never cry, but why mother, why, do the tears cry all by themselves???” There were also, of course, the songs composed in or for the military, about defending our homeland, about the Galil and the Negev. One song, rather sweetly speaks of the fact that the day will come when with a curved back we will sit in front of the fire and reminisce about how it was when we were in the commandos ..... The fact is that this day has come – our backs are now curved with age.

There were, of course, endless other songs which today I only remember in small sections, but they still make my skin go into goose bumps when I hear them. Is that nostalgia for a lost world? Many years later, when I went to Israel on a visit having re-found Simcha Pops, he took me

out to an evening of “shirei-am” folk songs. We sat on the floor and sang. I felt totally at home and a total stranger, all at the same time....

Music was also something that was with me a great deal. In addition to songs, I mean. My mother played the piano very well. She held evenings of singing with the Steins from Jerusalem [ I think they were the parents of the man who later became Rabbi in Berlin and now is retired in Hove ] When I remonstrated that I could not sleep, her admonishing words came back “hoer weg”. In the early school days we were all taught to play the Chalil – the tenor flute and I even graduated to the “Fa-flute” the next size up. Our music notation was in the do – re – mi – language. I never mastered the a-b-c one. In fact I never really mastered reading music off a sheet – the rudimentary stuff, yes, but when they changed Clef, or when it got more complex with heavier chords or strings I was lost. These facts came back to me when my children picked up music and were, clearly, so far beyond my abilities in the subject. I was overjoyed when they came to love music, each picking up their own preferred instruments and bringing so much joy to themselves and to those who were privileged to hear them play.

Then I was given piano lessons by Dr Fabian. The only thing I really remember about this is that he explained that he was never as busy at doing things which were waiting to be dealt with as when he was waiting for a pupil who was late. He was also quite exasperated about the lack of practice in the intervening days between the lessons. I hated practising, unless my mother sat down with me. Then I loved it! Many years later – that was already in England – I bought a clarinet and had some lessons on that. I chose it because it was a “continuation” of the flute playing and because the sound of the clarinet is amazing to my ears. But I did not purchase a bucketful of time and patience - and practice was never something I really



learned. In consequence the clarinet playing also died a natural death.

Home – we lived at 122 Arlosorov Street, the last house in that street. The nearest house to us was no 114. In between were fields – or better just the hill slope. The spaces were, of course, filled in later, but in my mind those fields still exist. I will never forget the feeling one spring after I had been ill all winter and in bed for months. When I was allowed to get up and looked out, there were all the flowers in those fields, mainly the dark coloured deep yellow daisies, where later 116, 118 and 120 would be erected. The houses were all apartment blocks, usually some 6 or 8 of these. They were, of course all built on the hill slope, so that on the front [Arlosorov] one entered from street level, but from the rear one was at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Building was fundamentally different (in concrete) to the bricks used in England. Floors were made of a steel rod mesh over which concrete was poured. Walls were cast by pouring concrete between parallel wooden “shutters”. The cement was manufactured in Nesher – across the road from the Yaggur Kibbutz, where there was always dust in the air. The concrete had to be painted and under the climatic influence of the salt sea air, the hot sun and rain, often looked as if they could do with a new coat of paint. All pipes – electricity and water - were embedded in the concrete. In time the cement interacted with the galvanized iron pipes and leaks occurred – that was before science taught them what materials to use to stop this expensive nuisance. No. 114 was important because that was where the bus stop coming from down town was. At 122 there was a big sweep of the road, into Hess Street. When the driver knew me, he would go past the bus stop and drop me outside 122. That privilege felt very good! 114 was also important because you could go down the internal stairs and after a short distance down the hillside be in Hillel Street. They locked that door in later years because they were fed up with the through traffic, though for the life of me I cannot see what harm it did anyone.

Haifa, in essence was divided into "sections. Horizontally there was Herzl Street at its heart going East West. It separated the Haddar, the middle part from "town" the lower. In its middle Herzl Street was crossed by Balfour Street which went vertically up the hill, till it reached a T junction of Arlosorov Street. The highest part of Balfour Street was very steep and many a vehicle did not make it. In line, as a continuation of Balfour was a long series of wide stone stairs to Hess Street. I will never forget one year a Jeep with four English soldiers driving their vehicle up those stairs. We all stood at the bottom and gaped.

At the far end of Herzl Street is where Arlosorov started and curved, the longest street in Haifa – as far as no 122. Above Arlosorov the "higher town" started before you reached the top, simply known by the hill's name, the "Carmel".

So, to reach school, I slipped through 114, walked along Hillel to Balfour, down a few more streets and crossed the road to Pevsner. Maybe 15 minutes?? When the school moved I had to take a bus to go to school. It was a blow when after 1948 my father left the cooperative and I lost the privilege of free travel. Tickets never cost much, but it was still a real struggle.

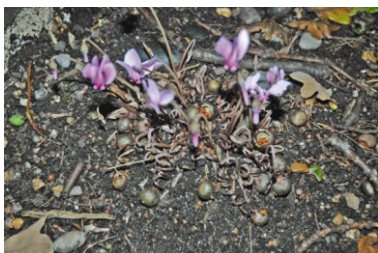
Not far from where Herzl met Arlosorov was a town section called "Geula". That is where the bus garage was and where the Hashomer Ha'za'ir building was. It was also where the pharmacy was whose owner organized the "Chove'vei Ha'te'va" – "Nature Lovers" weekend excursions into the hills of Israel. That was an incredible organisation and Ima and I loved it. We would meet on a Saturday morning in Geula and a group of 10 – 30 people would climb into the back of a truck which was equipped with wooden benches where normally cargo would be placed. Mostly the tarpaulin was removed and we would be taken somewhere in the hills, from where we would walk until

evening to a pre-arranged location where the truck would be waiting for us again to take us back to Haifa. This is how I really got to know my country and its nature. I remember caves with stalagmites and stalactites. I remember the wild black tulips and black Irises on the Gilboa – now apparently extinct. I remember being taught history at the Montfort Castle, the importance of water at the Jordan tributaries. It was the only time in my life where I saw a man fall in slow motion. Literally! He stumbled on a rock but managed to control his fall in such a way that he could cushion his fall and was not hurt. At one point we arrived, hiking, somewhere in the Galil where another group had arrived by car. They were dubbed “walkers in nylon stockings” – and that evokes another memory. Nylon stockings were new, a true luxury and exceedingly scarce. They became a “currency” with which the population could be enticed by the British soldiers. They were a source of envy of those that had them with that seam having to be vertical at the back, they demanded that one had a means of holding them up, because pantyhose had not yet been invented. Eventually they became available against rationing coupons, but were exceedingly expensive.

Whether on these group walks, or the many outings we had on the Carmel mountains, the most memorable are the ones we took in the spring, when the countryside was carpeted with wild flowers. There was no thought in those days that it was wrong to pick the wild flowers and we would return home with – literally – armfuls of that beauty of nature which then adorned our home for a few days. The realisation that we were depleting the countryside and that nature could not possibly compete with this rate of picking only dawned later when this practice was stopped. To this day, the thing that draws me most to what was the home of my youth are those flowers, albeit that there are far fewer there today compared with then – and some have even become extinct. Cyclamen, anemones and narcissi have always remained my most favourite of the huge variety which nature produced.



*Wild cyclamen*



*Cultivated, along White Gables Drive*

To this day I am smitten by wild flowers. They have become the essence of the memories of my youth. The approach drive to White Gables has a large number of cyclamen bulbs growing along it and I delight in the fact that they are multiplying of their own accord. In fact I got most excited when, only recently, I discovered for the first time how when the flower dies the seed pods develop and the stem curls to form a sort of a coiled spring with a bulbous seed pod at its centre.

So, in the early years our house was really not crowded, as so many others were. We had a superb view down to the harbour and the bay, albeit that on that sloping side the apartments of another house were visible too. On clear days the white snows on Mount Hermon could be seen in the distance. It was always inaccessible – in enemy

territory. Another place to which we always longed to get to was Petra. The Song “Hasela Ha’adom” (the red rock) was eventually forbidden to be broadcast because too many youngsters attempted to sneak into Trans Jordan (as it was then called), with disastrous results. Anyway, those houses below ours were built along the broad hand-hewn stone stairs which led down the flank of 122 [Koresh steps by name], to Hillel Street. It was from those apartments that I learned all the meal and Friday night prayers. It was onto that wall that I projected the cine film which I had got from Wilhelm Selig for the entertainment of the other boys at 122 and the occasional visitors. Later Selig loaned me an optical instrument on to which base you put a paper document and it was projected on to that same wall opposite – that instrument was called an epidiascope, a forerunner to the slide and overhead projectors. It was in the top flat of that house that I saw my mother nursing one of the many new-born babies while I was at home alone and it was there that I consciously observed the first baby suckling at its mother’s breast.

On the other side of that set of Koresh stairs was a stone wall and hillside – that was Arab territory.



*On the wall of the Arab territory, just outside our home*

A few Arabs lived in there and a little further the Persian Garden started [ later to become the Bahai Temple and garden] We had virtually no contact with the Arabs. In fact the only contact I can remember was with the occasional older men who would walk the streets announcing in a monotone the tomatoes and other vegetables which they had to sell [and figs, of course, in their season!!] They carried 2 brass dishes tied by strings to a larger stick, with a handle in the middle – their scales. There may have been one “official” weight – but otherwise stones of different sizes were used on that balance. The only time I recall any contact at all with Arabs was when my tricycle was stolen and my father went over that stone wall and eventually turned up with that tricycle. Beyond that, as far as I was concerned, there were no Arabs. One saw them on building sites. One saw them when you went down town to the harbour area. They had a few shops in the lower town and they lived in Waddi Rushmiyah. That

was the area where beyond the end of Herzl Street you emerged at the opening of a Waddi, where the road led to the "Krayot", the settlements in the Haifa bay and the "Emek" - these were really outside Haifa already, but vastly important because that is where the Rutenberg power plant was, where the Industry was situated, where you had to go to the way that led to Nahariya. Waddi Rushmiyah formed quite a long link which stretched up the hill past Geula and further up where there was a newish road joining the Carmel with Neve Shaanan. It was therefore a major problem when in 1948 the shooting started and the Arabs were able to cut off for a while the eastern approaches to Haifa from the vantage of their sniper positions along that valley.

I was often ill as a child, invariably these were colds, with ear problems and going down to the bronchials and lungs. I remember vividly the ear aches, treated with warm oil. One year it got so bad that the doctor [ Dr Caspari, I remember the name!] decided he had to perforate the ear drum. I was sitting on my mother's knees and he explained that he would stick a needle in there to ease the pressure, after that the pain would be gone. He promised faithfully that the moment I told him to stop, he would do so. Of course, by the time I did so he said that it was all over already....

I was a mouth breather – always and it was thought that that had contributed to my frequent sore throats.

At one point it was also decided to do something about my bite. I had rather protruding front teeth and I have never ever been able to make contact between my top & bottom incisors. In an attempt to alleviate this I was fitted with top and bottom braces. The top braces pulled the front teeth in. The bottom braces had a screw adjustment. With the turning of that screw the brace expanded sideways to widen the distance across the tongue. Every week or so another twist of that screw and it ached! In addition to

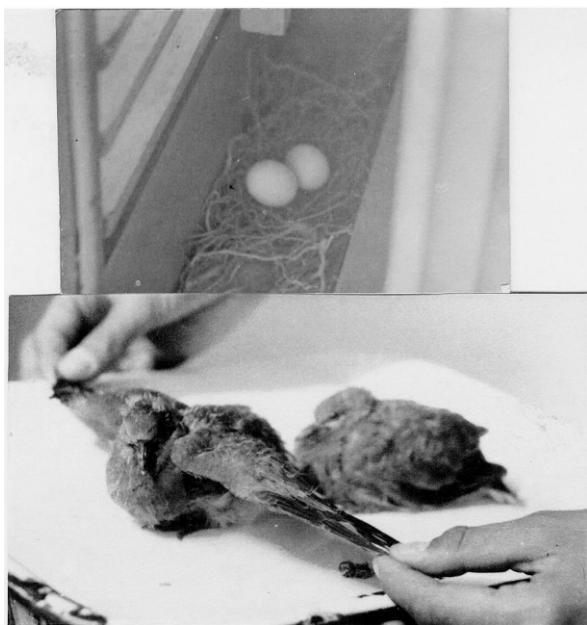
stressing the teeth there were also small rubber bands between the lower and upper braces. This, of course, increased the tension. As if this was not enough, they did extensive grinding of my molars in an attempt to make it possible for the bottom jaw to come forward a bit. Suffice to say, they never achieved this. I have no idea what damage they caused to the molars and I have never been able to cut a thread with my front teeth. Actually it is a nuisance sometimes – when you have a particularly long bit of food in your mouth and find that you cannot shorten it with the tools nature intended you to use for this purpose.

I also remember having my tonsils out. There were no injected anaesthetics then. To put me to sleep they held me down, put a tight fitting mask over my nose and mouth and made me breathe in a gas. Presumably that acted pretty quickly – but the memory and the fear of being suffocated have never left me. Our darling Finley had to endure this recently when they operated on him for the brain tumour. It triggered such memories in me .... They offered me ice cream afterwards and that was so painful. I have never liked ice cream – maybe that is the origin?, although I believe it is the cold on the teeth which I dislike. There were, of course, no antibiotics yet. In the main they were mainly Sulphur drugs which made you go alternately hot and cold ... Another time I went down with amoebic dysentery, while my mother was being treated for a tape worm. Apart from remembering the fact of my dysentery and using it in order to get out of being forced into the British Army, I really have no memory of it. The tape worms, however, were a source of much merriment which my poor mother had to endure and eventually she actually laughed with me.

One period of illness is vivid in my memory. My room had a large, 3-pane window of which we really only used two. All the windows had shutters as well, to keep the heat of the sun out and here we used only the two. A pair of pigeons noticed that this shutter was never opened and



built a nest in the safety of that space. I had great fun watching the eggs, seeing the chicks emerge and being fed. They nearly had their lives curtailed when my mother with a shriek discovered a long trail of lice between that nest and my bed. I remember remonstrating, using methylated spirits along the trail to disinfect it and promising to be vigilant in case of a repeat.



*"my" pigeons*

I also remember with great pleasure our success with aquariums kept in my room. I had two – one the nursery for pregnant females. Even though we were able to separate the main aquarium with a dividing net wall, it was easier to pull the females out. There were some who had live births, the guppies, mollies and the various swords. Others, like the Zebras, laid eggs. My room was facing north – looking out over the harbour and the bay and the plants did not like that. We then installed a hinged mirror on the joint room/kitchen balcony parapet which reflected sunlight onto

the aquarium. That worked almost too well and I had to fight the algae which now grew with gusto, but was a very important teaching tool for me. I learned so much from these experiences - not only fish husbandry but also about the associated electrical equipment – immersion heaters, air pumps, filters, let alone about photosynthesis ... All my fish came from a shop run by Mr Hellmann on Nordau Street, [ after Max Nordau, Hungarian Zionist leader, physician, author and social critic. He was a co-founder of the World Zionist Organization together with Theodor Herzl and president or vice president of several Zionist congresses], one of the few shops selling pure luxury. I think all other shops sold only functionary goods which were needed by the population for survival.

That balcony also housed my tortoise collection – up to 7 of them at times. We found them roaming on the hill outside the house. I even had eggs laid one year, but they broke on the stone floor. After that I set my collection free again. I remember feeling great remorse that my carelessness brought about the breakage of those eggs.

Those hillsides of the Carmel were close by, but represented “freedom” to me. If it was the right season I would stop to collect Znobbarim – the pine cones kernels extracted with great difficulty and much stickiness from the fresh resin-oozing pine cones.

We also collected the buds of a wild rose growing on the hillside and marinated these – that is how I learned about capers. It seems strange to me to this day when we open a jar of capers made in some factory and “not the real thing”. Other “free stuff” were, of course, the figs, green ones and mauve ones. It was another tree on which the sap tended to make you very sticky, only this was milky-white, not yellow resin. Like many times in my late life I would be allowed a certain leeway during which to harvest but then the cry would go up “we want to leave now” and I

was no way finished, there was still more harvesting to be done!

One feature of our apartment was that it was “fluid” – it changed with the seasons. There was a great upheaval of furniture being shifted from one room to the next because the way the sun would impact on the occupants at a particular time of the year. That, of course changed when my father departed and my mother had to take in lodgers.

1943 was the year in which I started collecting stamps. I was given a mottled-grey hard cover lever arch binder and a supply of feint red millimetre paper, as well as a hole punch and – very new then – reinforcement rings which could be glued over the holes to repair these when they tore. For each country a separate sheet was started, sorted alphabetically and the stamps were fixed by means of short sticky paper cut from a long reel. These were folded so that the major part was glued onto the page, while the shorter bit was stuck to the stamp. I never bought stamps. We always swapped – or begged for them. My first words in English were “give me stamps please”, said to any soldier I may have encountered in the street or on the beach. As swapping was so important, I also made myself a swaps-album. This consisted of a hard cardboard cover over which I stretched a checked yellow piece of cloth as I had learned to do at school. The pages were again the millimetre paper, each sheet cut in two. The sticky tape was then cut to the correct page-width and only the lower edge and a short bit of the whole width at each extremity were wetted. When this had dried you had strips of paper on the sheet behind which you could slip the stamps. They were visible and not glued to the paper. The most valuable were, of course, the triangular and pentagonal / hexagonal stamps. In 1948, when the State of Israel was declared, I went to the post office and spent my own pocket money on a set of the high value stamps just issued. I knew that I would never get these any other way, because they were just too expensive. My mother was horrified that I could

waste my money on this. I have them still, of course and I guess they must be quite valuable now. After 1952 and until he died, my father kept up the arrangement with the Israel Post Office philatelic services and would send me all the new issues as a first day cover, as well as a set of the unfranked stamps. There were also a very large number of envelopes with special "slogan franking". While I was certainly glad that he kept this going I also felt that he owed it to me – it was the only thing on which he actually spent money for me and I was probably never grateful enough to him for this. I learned so much from that collection. Geography and history is almost obvious, but the care of stamps, getting them off the envelopes, sticking hinges, what is a series, the discipline of rejecting a torn stamp, the relationship with other kids when swapping stamps and much more. To this day I cannot throw a stamp away, no matter where it comes from and I feel very angry at our local sub-post office which invariably maintains that they do not have the "special issue" stamps. I deplore the modern trend of printed self adhesive labels.

## **1945 – 1948 – the struggle for independence**

I remember a succession of tenants living in one of the three rooms of our flat while I was growing up, some of whom contributed importantly to me doing so.

There was Eva – somehow personally known to my mother, I no longer remember who she was. One day I picked up a book of her notes – and gave it to her when she returned home. It is the only time I remember being asked to keep a secret. It seems it contained the code she had to use as a radio and communications officer working in the then underground military movement, the Haganah. I remember being very proud of the fact that I really had told no one about what I had seen. It was my private and personal confirmation that I was dependable and had done my little bit to help the cause. This resistance movement to the Palestine Mandatory Authority employed a lot of the younger people, but I really was too young to be involved.

There was a woman from whom I learned the facts of life concerning the relations between men and women. She was one of the refugees who had arrived from Hungary. It turned out that she was earning her living by entertaining men who were working in the harbour and when my mother realized what was going on [“they were queuing at the door and the neighbours were complaining as well” she explained ] she asked that woman to leave.

There was Jacob Steiner a young man who also was a Hungarian survivor. On him Michael Gettinger and I learned for the first time about erection and ejaculation. The novelty soon wore off and there was never any attempt to touch us youngsters. Jacob was really a very nice and very lonely individual and happened to be the only adult male in close proximity.

After him came Michael who ran the Peltours tourist office in downtown Haifa. He married Lala and after him came her mother as a tenant. She and her 2 daughters had survived the Polish camps. The rest – her husband, at least one son and other family members all perished. She and Maya were wonderful women and we were friends for many years afterwards. Lala's sister was in a psychiatric home and never left it. She was totally broken as a result of her ordeals. Before Michael and Lala moved out into their own apartment on the Carmel I had learned from the couple what men & women do when they are alone and in the mood. They, of course, had no idea that that little boy was on the shared balcony, full of curiosity and ignorance.

Holiday times were often a problem, because my mother had to work and could not just take time off. I had to be placed somewhere. Thus it was that already from fairly early I was sent to others for the holiday period. Nahariya at the Lubranschicks was one example.



*June 1939 Lubranschik chicken*

There is a picture of me in the chicken coop at the very point when I was apparently wetting myself, aged 22 months. Herbert Lubranschik [later Lubrani] had a sister Hilde who married my father's brother Hans in Sydney, Australia. Nevertheless, Herbert was always Ima's friend,

not Aba's. He was one of the early Yekkes in Nahariya and lived in a wooden hut that had been a "Lift" before being converted into a living structure. Many years later it was considerably enlarged, but always remained a lovely wooden villa with walls lined with varnished and polished plywood – one of the earliest structures there. When I knew him he had already divorced Senta [Rubel] and married Hilde by whom he had Amira and Gaddi.



*Gaddi, Hilde & Herbert Lubrani, Nahariya home*

We absolutely loved it in Nahariya and often slept on the beach under the stars. It was there that the first feeble attempts to teach me to swim were made and it was there that I learned to ride a bicycle. It was there that I encountered the first death of a pet. I had been given a little wire-haired Terrier dog which I was allowed to bring with me to Nahariya while staying alone there. Herbert did not want to have the dog in the house and so it was agreed that it would sleep in the tool shed. The next morning I found it dead, hanging by its collar on the bench vice handle. It had evidently jumped and jumped to get out and was accidentally caught by that collar. Herbert came after me when he heard me cry, took a spade and we buried it in

the sandy ground on his plot. That was a hard lesson to learn and I know how badly Herbert felt about this for many years.

Nahariya was a wonderful place for me. I always felt so free there – free to come and go, free to walk barefoot on sandy tracks and on the beach. Several of my Haifa friends had family there, so often I had a friend to be there with me. It was there that I first learned a bit about agriculture and how hot the sand can be in the sun. One story that came back just now: Michael Gettinger (in my school class, the earliest photos with him show us at 27 months old] was so in love with Rutti Tasse, a girl also in our class in Haifa. (This was the Rutti whose painting I presented to our art teacher, Yaskil.) He was really pining for her. He took himself to a field close to the railway line and carved a heart into its bark with an arrow across and their two names. He had no idea that this happened to be – of all places – the field belonging to Rutti's grandparents.... All these old friends have gone from my life. Despite putting considerable effort into it, I have failed to learn what happened to Michael. The last I remember of him was a picture he sent of himself in American GI uniform – the Gettings too had left Israel and went to the USA.



*Nahariya beach. Nomi next to me Michael Gettinger behind her Rentable beach hut in background. Ca. 1943. Aba behind, Ima on my left*



Herbert, like most of the German Jews, was a pure Yekke and found it a real struggle to make a living. In the early days he grew chicken in the back yard. It is here that I learned to recognize "Injil" an Arabic name for a plant with rather circular leaves which are yellow when young and which the chicken loved to eat. Later, when he had managed to amass the huge cost of cages this farming turned to battery rearing and then at some point ceased. I do not think that he was able to make a go of it financially and in any case, he had never been a farmer. How he ended up in Nahariya, rather than a little further south in Rammot Hashavim [otherwise known as "die Huehner-Yekkes" ] I no longer recall. Herbert's great passion was postage stamps. He was an avid collector. When, in 1948 the UN voted for the partition of Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews and the War of Independence started, Nahariya and the entire Galil were cut off for a while from the rest of the Jewish population. Herbert organized the postal services from Nahariya, by boat across the Mediterranean Sea, or Haifa Bay, to Haifa. This included the printing and sale of the special Nahariya postage stamps. I was one of the many to whom Herbert generously gave some of these stamps, because by then that bug had bitten me too.

Nahariya also was the place of another important development in my life. It is where I suddenly found out that I was able to swim, after all. A great deal of effort had been put into the attempts to teach me, all – till then – to no avail. I must have been about 9 years old. My mother had gone into the water, way past the breakers, where the water was deep and calm. That was where one can enjoy the heavy, slow, swell of the water lifting you up and gently letting you down, while you either swim, or just lie on your back and allow yourself to be carried by the power of the sea. I was sitting on the beach, bored, alone. I went into the water, dived past the first waves, allowing them to either wash over my head or carry me upwards, kept an eye on the distance where I knew my mother was and

then, a little while later, I was bobbing up and down next to her. Her face was a mixture of fear – how could she get that little bundle safely back to shore, but at the same time proud that her “can’t swim” son had finally mastered it. That was absolutely wonderful. From then on nothing kept me out of the water. If the flags were at black, I would go up beach and swim where the life guard had no jurisdiction. “Irresponsible and lacking discipline” some might say, but already then I believed that I knew far better what I was or was not capable of doing. I never took a chance where I knew the currents were too strong for my breast stroke, [ I never learned to crawl properly, side crawl perhaps, but not the proper crawl stroke with the head coming up for air on alternate strokes ] and the fact is that I never ever got into trouble in the sea. That Mediterranean also made me rather choosy. Except for the Caribbean seas and Eilat in the height of summer, I never found anywhere else where I was happy with the water temperature. I was a slow swimmer, never competed against others. Once I did an endurance swim in the sea – 10 km – and completed it, but much later than the other kids who had started with me. The only thing which definitely did keep us out of the water was the cry of “jelly fish” which loved the eastern Mediterranean. I have only ever experienced a sting seriously once and remember how painful that long, red weal is – as if you have been hit by the thong of a whip. One certainly learned quickly to respect those translucent balls of jelly and to wonder why they had been invented.

There were three main beaches where we went to swim from Haifa: Bat Galim [ which had a seawater swimming pool adjacent to the sea itself and where my love for Tiras [ corn on the cob ] was born – a man with a shiny galvanized hot water bath strapped to his front shouting his wares and sprinkling rough sea salt onto the freshly cooked cobs. It was at that pool that our teacher took us and taught us to jump from the diving tower. I can still feel the sensation of being hauled out of the water by him, held more or less horizontally under his right arm as he climbed the tower

and being pushed in by him back into the water after I had been dunked moments earlier by a child who had jumped in after me and landed on my head. Rather rough treatment, but the only way to ensure that I did not develop a permanent phobia, in case others, too, took it upon themselves to jump too soon, before I had cleared the landing zone.

The other beach was Atlit, or Chayat Beach [after the Arab who owned land there and – I think – a bottled gas distributorship]. Here we went far more frequently. Here too, as a small child, I remember being caught by a wave and being rolled over and over in whirls of water and stinging zivziv [the term for the rough sand in which the sea shells were not yet pulverised to soft sand]. Here I was rescued by an English soldier [so I must have been 6 or 7 when it happened] who happened to be bathing on that beach. He made some conversation with my grateful mother after that and asked to meet with her in Haifa. My mother misunderstood where he was proposing that they meet and asked whether it was the Naafi [the food and general stores organisation of HM Forces, providing retail and leisure services to the services] upon which he responded rather indignantly “Madam, I am an officer!”. That really could not be seen of a man in swimming trunks....

The most memorable swim for me remains the midnight swim in Akko Bay. It was the end of a long day walking in the Galil. We had an evening meal at the campfire on the beach, it was very warm and a full moon shone. Someone said “let’s go swimming” but, of course none of us had bathing costumes. And so the obvious solution was that we all stripped and went in with no clothing whatever. That swim was pure pleasure, to feel the cool of the water across the entire body with nothing inhibiting the flow and motion, while all around was lit by moon and stars, that was just “out of this world”. It was also an important lesson for me in terms of losing inhibitions. I came to realize that

there is absolutely no sense in feeling shame and that was very liberating.

Another childhood vacation destination for me was the Blum household in Tel Zvi [ only I remember that name now, today it is very much part of Pardes Hanna ]. That was the home of my father's oldest sister Erna, her husband Jacques and their two sons Heini (no one called him Yehuda) and Rudi (equally, no one called him Israel), both considerably older than I. They lived in a lovely concrete built cottage, with a large garden surrounding their house and a plot of land further away where oranges were being grown – later avocados as well. The streets were all sandy in those days, mode of transport – donkey and cart or bicycle. It is here that I learned to hold the reins, steer the animal to go where I wanted it to – and at the rate I wanted [while remembering not to tire it out!] and never to use the whip to cause pain. It is here that I first saw agriculture first hand, helped to harvest strawberries, walnuts, oranges. I learned the use of the “Turiah” (a spade-like tool at nearly 90-degrees to the wooden handle swung rather like a pick-axe), the standard tilling tool adopted from the Arab population. It is actually remarkable how much we adopted from our Arab neighbours – many of the “standard Israeli” foods are actually Arab, notably the Humus, Tahina, Falafel, the many salads eaten – especially at breakfast, etc. I learned to open circular troughs around the base of the trees so that water collected in them and was not wasted by flowing away from the tree. I was sent on that donkey and cart to collect milk from another farmer – in galvanized large churns with an hermetical seal held down by a lever which “squashed” the lid onto the container itself. These were sunny days, we were in shorts only – no need for shoes, but sandals when the sun was high and the sands became too hot.... Another memory: Jacques was collecting grass trimmings at the front of his house using a rake. There were quite a few such mounds lying there when I arrived on the scene, I offered to help. I was given the task of taking each of those

small heaps to a larger compost heap. I naturally zeroed in on the biggest one and picked it up. I saw a yellow and brown striped hornet emerge and it stung me in the soft tissue just under the eye. They rushed me to a doctor and I was given one of those dreadful sulphur injections and went alternately hot and cold. I was ill with fever for a day or two, but there was no lasting effect. I never again picked up a heap of anything without first prodding it.

Jacques Blum was born in 1882 in Odessa. He married my aunt Erna Lewin in Danzig [ where they had a tobacco factory] Jacque's mother, a "widow Blum" had moved with her children in about 1850/1860 from Odessa to Jerusalem – at that time still in the Turkish Ottoman - and opened a bakery there. Some of the adult children left Palestine, for Odessa, among them Jacques' father.

It is doubtful whether a woman on her own would have done this. Probably there was a male in the household, or possibly she was the dominant of the family and hence no male is mentioned in this family lore – these are all things we have not been able to establish thus far in the genealogy research.

In Odessa Israel Blum (Jacques Blum's father) married Golda Gellmann. They moved to Germany – Danzig - where there was a thriving tobacco industry.

On 8-9 November 1938 the "Kristallnacht" pogrom in Germany the Nazis destroyed the Blum tobacco factory, but they found the family Turkish passports which saved their lives. The Blums then emigrated to Palestine and at first Jacques tried to earn a living hawking goods. Later he resorted to physical labour. The family still have the metal weight at the end of a pole, which he used to consolidate earth where repairs were being made to roadways. He grew rabbits to have food. He died young [aged 68], in rather poor health as he was totally unused to such physical labour.

I never really got to know my cousin Heini. He was in the British army, later married and was away from Pardes Hanna. His brother Rudi, however, I knew and loved well. Rudi had been sent to a well known agricultural college and worked in agriculture all his life. He grew flowers commercially – that is where I learned about Gerbera and how one picks Carnations by snapping them at a leaf-intersection. That was only a side-line for him – he actually worked as an advisor to farmers on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture. It was he who introduced the semi-circular PVC tunnels for hot houses and the growing of avocados into Israel.

One summer I was sent with a friend to another family - Bienheim – in Kfar Yedidiah. I think it was Ruven Kallinoff who was with me there, a little older than myself, actually Ari de-Levie's friend, not mine and I was often jealous that those two did not let me in on their games while in Haifa. Anyway, of Kfar Yedidiah two memories stick out. The first was that they owned a donkey, as well as a mule and we visiting boys were allowed to ride them. Bare back – singly or both of us together. I was also allowed to hitch the mule to a wagon and steer it through the fields and villages. There was a ditch along our route into which we delighted to steer the animal, zooming down and uphill again. There was always a tussle as to who would be sitting at the front – because he, of course held the reins. On that one day I was at the front and at speed we trotted down that ditch slope. I did not expect what happened next: the donkey suddenly stopped at the bottom of the slope and I went sliding along the neck of the beast onto the ground in front of it with a considerable thud. After that and for a long time, I was quite content to be the rider who sat behind.

I was supposed to return to Kfar Yedidiah the following year, but it never happened. Their son, about my age, had been bitten by a snake and had died.



*On the back of the cart*



*and on the back of the mule in Kfar Yedidiah*

One of the many people who arrived in Palestine in 1945 was Simon de Leeuwe, from Amsterdam. He was a survivor of World War 2. He had come to Palestine in the 1930's, worked for the bus cooperative, but for some

reason could not make a go of it and so returned to Holland before it became clear that war would break out. He was part of the underground resistance and at some point must have been shot. He bore a scar which had to have been the result of such an injury, but would never tell me how he came by it. Now he made another attempt at living in Israel, having left his wife and children in Holland. While in Haifa he got a job driving as a civilian for the British Army and on rare occasions he would take me with him. Simon was a great friend of my mother. I think he seriously considered leaving his wife who was mentally ill. My mother would have none of it. She told me she wanted someone who could provide for her and me and Simon had nothing except for talent. He eventually returned to Holland, lived with an Indonesian woman in Neuve Achtergracht and eventually married her when his wife in Bilthoven died. Simon was a superb artist and carpenter. He particularly liked still-life. He was fascinated by the old olive trees of which he made endless pencil sketches – often while waiting in his jeep for some British Officer to return. In Holland he became a cabinet maker – and even came over to England at one point to build fitted wardrobes for Ima. I learned from him the art of jig sawing pictures out of some laminated wood and later painting these with oil paints. A Bambi scene made like this still exists. it stands silhouetted against the window in our upstairs “Michael’s” room. After we had emigrated to England I went to visit Simon one summer and stayed both with him in Amsterdam and with his wife [ and two children Ruth and Reuben ] in Bilthoven. I can still remember arriving in Amsterdam where Simon waited for me at the railway platform. We walked out of the station and as I stepped into the road to cross it he yanked me back with some force. I had looked right, instead of left. It was that point in time which taught me and on which I based my advice to visitors in years to come never to worry about which way to look first – as long as one remembered to look twice each way. One of the most memorable impressions of those days were the breakfasts. We sometimes had kippers for



breakfast in London. In Amsterdam we went to the fish market and every day returned with a different type of smoked fish.

Amsterdam was also the place where I for the first and only time in my life encountered an attempt of homosexual approach. I was in town, as a tourist and at some point, again just about to cross the road from that station when I felt a strange hand touch my groin. The disgust and fear which hit me in the pit of my stomach has remained with me ever since. I never saw who it was – I just ran and ran, at least 2 blocks, not knowing whether anybody was chasing me – which there was not. It was sheer panic. I then caught the tram a little further along the route, to return to Simon's home. I never mentioned it to him, or anyone else, for that matter.

Another impressionable thing to have remained with me from that time was the fact that if you wanted to post a letter in Amsterdam, you put it in a letter box at the back of the tram. This carried it to the central station where it was collected by the post office itself. That seemed so sensible! The stay in Bilthoven is concentrated in my memory in bicycle rides with Ruth and her friends. We were good friends, had Habonim and the love of Israel in common. I seem to remember exchanges of letters as well. She eventually married Lipchitz and one day came to visit us in London with her daughter. Ruth looked like a hippie and an eccentric one at that and we felt she was weird. We lost contact after that.

## 1946 first sight of England

When I was 8 and a half my mother took me to England. That was December 1945. The war had just ended. The way one did that in those days was to go from Haifa to Cairo by train. There you stayed in a hotel and waited for a seat on an aircraft. There was a priority system. Generals in the forces got a priority A, civilians with a small child did not even warrant a Z. As a result we spent 2 weeks in Cairo of which - amazingly for me - I remember quite a bit! (My mother would not buy me those ducklings sold on the bridge; we went up the Nile on a boat and on the way back it was so rough the boat could not go so we had to take a bus instead; more people hanging on the outside of the trams than had space on the inside; a shop whose whole glass front was a wall of Halva; pulling on Ima's arm to get out of the Cairo Museum; climbing the Pyramids). Eventually when we were about to return to Haifa because the money had run out, two seats became available. We flew in a military Dakota aircraft - no pressurisation. Between Cairo and London we endured eight landings and take-offs - each time flying up and down in helical circuits which made us feel so sick. We were in flying suits as there was no heating either. While I called for a paper bag to be sick in (I remember this flight each time I go in a plane now - and see those bags 'at the ready') my mother's middle ear burst - literally. It was not a pleasurable experience, this first flight of mine. Anyway, we did survive and got to London and hence to Nottingham where my grandparents lived at that time. As we were staying for about 2 or 3 months, I was put in a school. I spoke German - but not a word of English! In one lesson I was asked whether I would like to do sewing or knitting. The second word sounded more like the German "naehen" (to sew) so I opted for that - to find 2 thick needles in my hands and a ball of wool! I can STILL - I feel certain - do the basic stitches and it was a very good thing to learn! It was a cold winter. I always walked home from school. On

one occasion I returned home late. My mother nearly died of worry while waiting for me - what had happened??? Well, I explained, we found that wax and were sliding on it. I had never seen ice before..... memories.... I really do have very few.



*That's me 2<sup>nd</sup> from left in 2<sup>nd</sup> row from rear – the school in Nottingham*



*School uniform -wearing "shorts" & tie*

I remember very little about my grandfather [ he died 19 Feb 1947] except that he was venerated by the family and often quoted. He was clearly a very practical man. I clearly remember complaining to him about the structure of the toilets in England where, when I did my big business, it always splashed back and I ended up with a wet bum. To his credit he did not laugh, took it seriously and suggested that I float a sheet of paper on the water before I sat down. It is a practice I put into practice and found exceedingly useful.

In Germany he had worked on the earliest plastics researches, invented "Leikorit" which was a resin with the same physical characteristics as ivory. We possess all sorts of little samples still, but it ceased being used when it became too expensive after Bakelite was invented. In the 1990's when there was a great deal of publicity concerning the plight of the elephant in Africa as a result of ivory poaching, I made contact with Raschig in the hope of finding a new use for his outmoded material – selling it in Africa for carving. When I had eventually got through to the Director of the Company and explained that I was the grandson of Dr Max Koebner, he put the phone down on me. Later I learned that Raschig had sold the rights to a Belgian company where I tried this again, but it never got off the ground. They only saw use for it in machine and fixings parts in engineering. Another item of my Grandfather's which we still use occasionally is a large, oval tray with a semi-circular handle which is extremely sensible, if not exactly beautiful.

One other memory from those days concerned the next door neighbours in Nottingham – the Helby's. They were friends of my grandparents and it was then that I learned the concept of inviting friends for tea. From time to time Patrick, a red headed boy, would come and visit our house. I still had some of my precious Halva which we had brought from home and I was made to offer it to Patrick. I think I can still feel the relief when he said that he did not like it, I had been very loath to part with this precious commodity.

Many a time, in later years, when I was asked what I would like to have from Israel, my only wish was, invariably, some Halva.

We returned to Haifa some 5 months later – again by sea. We travelled to Marseilles by train where a friend of my grandparents called Gieler lived and who invited us to a phenomenal meal. I had never seen oysters before. Then on the next day we boarded the Trans Sylvania. This was a medium sized passenger ship, presumably Romanian, white, with a huge central funnel and lots of cabins. I do not remember much of the trip itself, only the arrival in Haifa. I knew my father would be waiting at the dock – I just knew that he would manage to get a permit to enter the dock area which was a military zone and out of bounds to the population. I was so disappointed. We had arrived in the late afternoon. By the time we docked [ next to the upturned hulk of the “Patria” ] the curfew was about to start and no one was allowed to leave the ship. That upturned hulk remained a black line in the harbour for many years. Eventually, with a great deal of effort it was removed and thus an extra docking space was created. There I was looking up where half way up the hill was my house, my father and unable to get to him. I think it was the first time that I learned what hate is. I hated the soldiers who enforced the rule which kept me prisoner in MY country and refused me access to MY home and MY father. It was only a 12-hour wait, during some of which I slept, but it was very long. The next day my father did get to the ship itself – at least some of my wishes had come true, if a little late.

***Wikipedia on the refugees ship Patria:***

*The Patria disaster occurred on 25 November 1940 when the Patria, a French-built ocean liner, sank in Haifa harbour after a bomb carried covertly on board exploded, killing 260 people and injuring another 172. At the time of the sinking, the Patria was carrying around 1,800 Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe who were being deported by the British to Mauritius and Trinidad because they did not possess entry visas (whose issuance had been restricted after the publication*

*of the White Paper of 1939) for Mandate Palestine. The deportation was opposed by Zionist organisations including the underground paramilitary Haganah group, which planted a bomb with the intention of disabling the ship to prevent it from leaving Haifa. However, the Haganah miscalculated the effects of the explosion and the bomb caused the ship to sink in under fifteen minutes, trapping hundreds in the hold. The survivors were subsequently permitted to remain in Palestine on humanitarian grounds.*

Vivid in my memory are hours of watching ships come and go into the Haifa harbour, mostly military ships in steel grey belonging to the British Navy. Tankers went towards the refinery in the bay. Also, frequently, those over laden rickety and unseaworthy boats bringing “illegal immigrants,” as the British named them. Some, of course, evaded capture and were beached off Nahariya or the coast south of Haifa. Many were captured by the Royal Navy and forcibly towed into Haifa for enforced repatriation to the Cyprus detention camps. You can imagine the impression on us watching from our homes, when a whole ship erupted in a defiant song such as “Hevenu Shalom Aleichem”. That was how I learned that particular song. The words were so simple, so was the tune, but the message was particularly powerful.

Presumably that visit to England was to precipitate the divorce. One day my father invited me to go for a walk with him on the Carmel. That was strange – he had never done that before! Yes, we did go as a threesome from time to time. Anyway, we were walking along Panorama, that street along the ridge of the mountain, looking down onto the town, the harbour and further the industrial area and the “Krayot” (plural of Kirya). My father explained to me that there are some times in life when grownups can no longer go on living together but the child must know that it will continue to have both a mother and a father who each loved the child, even if they no longer loved one another. I remember the fact, clearly, but do not remember my initial reaction. I must have been stunned and I must have

hidden it from him. I know he brought me home again, I know I cried in my mother's arms and I know I later ran to Hertl to tell her. I think it was that which brought my mother and Hertl back together again. Conjecture as an adult tells me that I must have been totally bewildered. I do not remember any quarrels or raised voices in our home. On the contrary, my father tended to exert his authority while whispering. There were times when he would ask me to do something and it was my mother who would thump the table with the flat of her hand and cry out "will the child finally now do as it is told!!". There was never any quarrelling between them. So here I was suddenly confronted with the reality that my father moved out, that I was to see him every two weeks for the weekend. It was then that I developed my very strongly held belief that in a divorce I do not care two hoots about who is right and who is wrong – I only care about the child. I hated that "visitation right" and while I did go through with it, I did so with less and less enthusiasm. It vanished altogether when later on my father announced that he was to remarry a Hanna Weiss. She had a pointy nose, a shrill voice, always interrupted and I hated her. At that time my mother was working as a nursery nurse in the Molada maternity hospital on the Carmel. Fate had it that Hanna went there to give birth and my mother chucked her job in. She could not be working there when Hanna was there because if something went wrong in that confinement, she could be accused of having done something criminal.

How did I react to the reality of living with the divorce? There are only a few actual memories and I think the rest is intellectual explanation. Certainly my school work deteriorated. I had been an excellent student, not necessarily the best in the class, but certainly at the top. [I had never been competitive and never cared whether I was better or worse than others], but now I ceased learning and was actually given a private teacher for a while – a teacher named Miri who was a very close friend to Hertl. It was in Miri's home that I stole her alarm clock which I had coveted

and later explained to my mother that I had “found and kept it”. My mother marched me to Miri to return it and to apologise - which I did, but it was decided that I was no longer to have lessons there, in a way to make sure that I was no longer led into temptation. The fact was that I did not need lessons because of not understanding the school material. The other fact was that I did not need an alarm clock.

The other result was that I probably grew up much faster at age 9 than I would have done had I remained in a stable home environment. I was given the key to the house, I was sent much more often to do the shopping, I was relied on to be “the man in the house” and I learned to apply my ability in maintenance of the things we had. But I never again was a good student. I had the intelligence, but as my mother put it “I never learned how to learn”.

I know that I was missing what is normally called a “family life” – because our unit had been shattered. An example of this was an invitation for Ima and me by my class teacher Nomichke - I must have been about 11 or 12 at that time – to celebrate the Passover with her family. It was awesome. We had never had a Seder in my home. I had never known Nomichke to be anything other than my beloved Geography, Biology and Zoology teacher. I was totally unaware of her having a husband, never mind other family members – and yet they lived only a stone’s throw away up very steep steps from Arlosorov into another of those dirty-white to grey concrete apartment houses. That invitation would have never come had it not been for the fact that she was sorry for Ima and me and knew we would be alone at a time when other families gather. Maybe that is why the Seder became so significant an evening for me, the only Jewish festival that I really know something about and love to keep. Divorce was not yet a common, acceptable occurrence and was without question a stigma.



## Passover

For years we have always had a big Seder which I give at home. Apart from keeping our family as a 'unit' - it has also given us the opportunity to invite our friends and "waifs and strays" - people who otherwise would have no Seder or Passover. For many years now we have invited a sizable contingent of ex-Russian refugees whom we befriended and from whom we have derived so much.

Passover is really the Jewish Festival which has meant more to me than all the others. I love contributions - be it those I have read up before the evening itself, or those that some of the guests bring with them. It is not a matter of gabbling all of the Hagadah down in one breath. It is the story telling, the arguments which ensue, the meaning of "freedom" and the big, festive togetherness which this festival intones, which have made it important to me. It is truly for me a keeping of tradition and history and not religion, even though it clearly is a religious event.

Even though we kept no religion in the house, it was part of our every day. The festivals were kept nationally. Only some people went to Synagogue while others did not. The "did not" brigade was far larger in those days than the "did". That, like almost everything else in the Israel I grew up in, has changed radically. I have always felt that it was only the Jews of the Diaspora who "needed religion" to remind them to which nation they belonged even when their non-Jewish neighbours were not doing so at that time. We Israelis did not need it. To us Judaism was a way of life. It was our history and literature, we lived it day to day, we spoke its language. Every festival was celebrated at school and our holidays were governed by the Jewish calendar. At Tu Bishvat we were out planting trees, at Shavuot we brought the first crops to the school. We erected Sukkoth as a norm, not because of religion and not because God would frown if we did not.

A festival which loomed big for me was Purim, so much easier celebrated in Israel than in the Diaspora. For us it was a national holiday rather than a religious one. In every year I was dressed up in one fancy get-up or another. Nothing was ever hired or bought for the occasion. I remember one year I was dressed up as a Chinese person. A black cloth stretched over my hair with a plait of rope sewn to the nape.



*Two of the many Purim outfits*

My mother used egg white to coat my temples. I had to grin like this for several minutes while it dried, so that my eyes appeared authentically slit. In an earlier year she made a cook's hat, a white tunic and trousers and a chain of cookies around my neck. It was without doubt these experiences which helped me later in life on occasions such as when I had to be a Father Christmas on a skiing holiday and when it was my children's turn to dress up.

## 1947 – Haifa

Wilhelm Selig was another survivor who arrived in Israel after 1945 – in this case from Poland. He had lost his wife in the camps. There was a daughter and a grandchild whom I have never seen even though we spent a great deal of time together with Wilhelm. He was a small, gaunt, mostly bald little man with a much wrinkled face, deep interested eyes and a lovely smile. He wanted to marry my mother, pursued her for years, but she would have none of it. Unlike her, he was not much for swimming and told many a time how this crazy woman went swimming in the sea one year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January. [I guess in this respect he was right! I cannot imagine what possessed her to do this.]



*1<sup>st</sup> of January at the sea*

Selig was Polish – the wrong culture from her point of view and he was not financially secure enough for her wants. [I ought to interrupt here with a paragraph about prejudices

among the Jews of Palestine/Israel. They were very real! In Germany, the “Ostjuden” with their Yiddish speaking were looked down upon. In the 1800’s there was a huge push from Poland into Germany and the German Jews as well as the indigenous German population were seriously concerned about so much poverty arriving for economic reasons. When the German Jews first arrived in Palestine, the opposite became true. The Russian and Polish emigration had preceded them and they looked down on the Yekkes who spoke no Hebrew and had no practical skills with which to build the country. Later both these groups would look down on – for example – the Moroccans or Romanians and so it went on. ] Anyway, back to Selig, or “Willi” as he was known ...

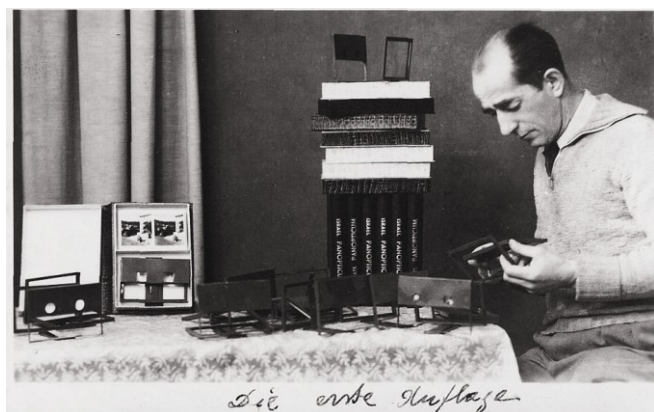
I always resented the fact that Ima never re-married, because it put so much responsibility on my shoulders, but there it was. Willi moved about town on a 100cc motorcycle which, when not enough power was available, could be helped manually by pedal power. The Dutch call this contraption a “Bromfiets”. He was a photographer, set up a little business photographing in his studio individuals and couples for passports, weddings, anniversaries.



*A happy New Year greeting card – one of my productions*

Willi was an entrepreneur with great ideas, but sadly they seemed to bear no fruit. He had brought with him – note that was 1947 – the art of permanently depositing a

photographic image onto porcelain and was hoping to compete with the European manufacturers who put delicate hand-painted designs on to china before firing it. Another area where he involved himself was 3-dimensional photography – he made his own metal and wood diapositive slide holders which, when viewed through the two eyepieces, appeared to give a 3D image.

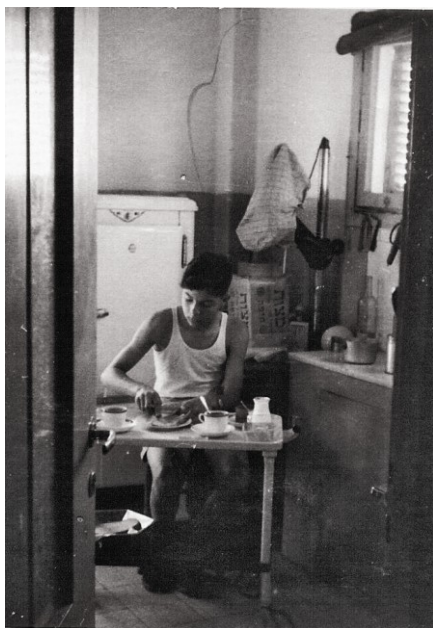


*Selig Wilhelm with the first of his 3-dimensional slide viewers*

Naturally I too was given one of these. To Willi I owe my now long forgotten knowledge of working in a photographic dark room and the enlargement of the pictures to whatever size, or whatever section one wanted. I learned all about dark rooms, the orange lights, light sensitive films and papers, development of the films and drying them, development and fixing of photographs and obtaining shiny or matt finishes. I spent a great deal of time downtown in his studio and absolutely loved it. Later I obtained a set of my own equipment and kitted out our kitchen with it. Air-raid black-out curtains, the enlarger, the bottles of solution and their dishes robbed Ima of a considerable percentage of her space and afforded me one of the most wonderful hobbies.

I also learned the art of touching pictures up – pencils of various hardness and degrees of grey which were used to

obliterate white blemishes on the paper-photos so that they were both unnoticed and enhanced the end product. Dark patches were scratched out with sharp dissecting knives and re-touched with the charcoal or lead of the pencils. I did a lot of dark room work until the advent of colour photography. Suddenly the equipment needed, with different solutions and photographic papers became too complicated for me and it became so much easier to give them to a photo shop.



*The darkroom in our kitchen – just before Passover.  
Note the black cloth-roll to cut out daylight  
The Matzot are in the background, but the bread basket  
is at the bottom of the trolley.*

My photography became a great hobby. I was given an Agfa Isolette camera and took quite nice, but by no means especially good, photos. One series of which I was very proud was taken on a school outing. Apart from the usual scenic locations there was one of David Hausmann lying

down on the brook's edge to drink and I just caught the ripples formed in that crystal-clear water.

Eventually Willi declared an ultimatum – Ima either married him or he would stay away. For a while I continued to visit him – or rather his dark room – but eventually it faded and we lost contact.

There was an amazing separation between the British I liked and those I hated. It was the Brigade of Guards which was stationed in Palestine at that time and because they were required to be at least 6ft tall, “all Englishmen were giants”. One did not mix or mingle with the English who were clearly “the enemy” but I did learn my first words in English with the sentence “give me stamps please”.

The British army was the source of much and contradictory emotion for the Jewish population in Palestine. Initially they were of course most welcome because of the liberation from the Turks and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which promised us a homeland. That I suppose lasted for quite a long time and a considerable number of Jewish Volunteers joined the forces in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. To get them to be recognized as a Jewish Brigade was another matter and took a considerable period of time and political fighting. It was the end of World War 2 which brought about a complete about turn in the relationships. With the kowtowing of the British to Arab interests, with a declared policy of not allowing refugees and survivors from the conflict zones entry into Palestine, the English became the enemy. Several underground Jewish military forces were created – the main one being the Haganah and their Commando units, the “Palmach” and “Palyam” (the latter used boats and escorted many of the refugee ships to Palestine). These were the security services created by the “socialist” or workers party. There were also the more extreme arms of the right-wing parties, the Lechi and the Etzel, which were a rule unto themselves. Tension between the two military extremes came to boil in early 1948 with the “Altalena Affair” when the Haganah [ by that

time already the Israel Defence Force because the Declaration of Independence had already been made] actually shot at the Etzel ship and personnel and an ugly situation arose in which the ship exploded. [Wikipedia Sixteen Irgun fighters were killed in the confrontation with the army (all but three were veteran members and not newcomers in the ship); six were killed in the Kfar Vitkin area and ten on Tel Aviv beach. Three IDF soldiers were killed: two at Kfar Vitkin and one in Tel Aviv.] The essence of this civil war was in the attitude of the Jewish population to the British and their "Mandate" and their differing views of how the land was to be liberated. The Etzel emblem was a map of Israel with a rifle depicted diagonally across it and the slogan "Rak Kach Kov'shim Mo'le'det" = This is the only way to conquer a homeland. Clearly the political direction of Ben Gurion and his "Jewish Agency" as the non-Government Jewish Government was called, was in favour of cooperating where possible with the British, but at the same time resisting them and storing weapons illegally.

The period leading up to the declaration of Independence and the acknowledgement of the State by the United Nations on 15 May 1948 was fraught with tension. The British declared a curfew every night. I well remember hearing British soldiers on the steps outside my room [leading from Arlosorov to Hillel Street] and going to the closed shutter in order to open it and look out. The shout of my mother still rings in my ears occasionally – warning me that they would shoot if my head stuck out of the window. Often there were reports of individuals who had been arrested by the British, suspected of being "members of the underground" and being locked up in places like the Atlit military camp, or worse, Akko Jail. At one point there was a real calamity when hidden arms were seized in a Kibbutz – such as Yagur, to where I had often travelled with my father on his bus. So this struggle was the background to the very strong feelings for homeland which were in all children at that time. No wonder that I refused to leave my



country when, in 1948 my mother first suggested that we do so.

Not far from Yagur was an important road intersection where the east-west Haifa to the Jordan Valley road met the North-South road going to Nahariya and beyond. There was a circular reinforced concrete structure at that point erected by the British. It had small, slit windows and was surrounded by sand-filled sacks. That was from where their machine guns protected that intersection. It was dubbed the “pillbox”, a name which has stuck to this day for that intersection. There were many such pillboxes up and down the country, for us a symbol of occupation.

Other than Nahariya, Yagur was the most distant point to which I travelled in the land on a regular basis. Yes – we had our trips into nature, but they were invariably 1-day walks. We rarely travelled anywhere else when I was young. A few years ago, as a result of my genealogical researches, I discovered that my father actually had family [other than the Blums in Pardes Hanna] in Israel – in Beer Sheva and yet he never spoke of them, we certainly never met with them, it was as if they never existed. [His aunt Jette LEWIN-FRIEDLANDER was brought to Israel by her daughter Helene SITTENFELD]. Likewise, Ima had family in Tel Aviv: Dr Alfred LEWIN who ran a polyclinic for “internal diseases” of both men & women as well as orthopaedics & surgery. In 2003 I ran an intensive search for them and discovered that the only descendant, Alfred’s granddaughter by then called Joyce Reynolds, died in Koeln on 30 Nov. 1991.



I was in Jerusalem only once. It was a long and tiring trip and we arrived very late in the evening at Ramban No. 9 – the home of Rosa & Bianca Lewin. They were 1<sup>st</sup> cousins of Ima, born in the 1880's. Hans Guenther REISSNER describes them as:

*“Of the handful of intellectuals who subscribed to political Zionism about half logically chose Palestine after Nazism had destroyed their livelihood in Germany.” I no longer know what they did exactly, but at least one of them was involved politically and worked for a long time with Teddy Kollek the Mayor of Jerusalem 1965 to 1993. [ Wikipedia: In 1935, three years before the Nazis seized power in Austria, the Kollek family immigrated to Palestine, then under British mandate. In 1937, he was one of the founders of Kibbutz Ein Gev, on the shore of Lake Kinneret. That same year he married Tamar Schwarz. They had two children, a son, the film director Amos Kollek (born in 1947) and a daughter, Osnat. In the 1940s, on behalf of the Jewish Agency (Sochnut) and as part of the "The Hunting Season" or "Saison" Teddy Kollek was the contact person for the British Mandate MI5, providing information against right-wing*

*Jewish underground groups Irgun and Lehi (known as "Stern Gang"). He was code named "Scorpion" by the British. The MI5 file on "Scorpion" was declassified after Kollek's death and for a while made headlines in the Israeli press.*

*During World War II, Kollek tried to represent Jewish interests in Europe on behalf of the Jewish Agency. In 1947–48, he represented the Haganah in Washington, where he assisted in acquiring ammunition for Israel's then-fledgling army. Kollek became a close ally of David Ben-Gurion, serving in the latter's governments from 1952 as the director general of the prime minister's office.]*

In Israel I was for a while a member of "Hashomer Haza'ir" – the very left wing – communist – youth movement. We had weekends on the hills around a camp fire. We were training to become pioneers on some Kibbutz (not that I actually intended to do this, but that was the spirit of the place). We were ever so proud to grow in the movement – I remember the honour of being entitled to wear the blue triangular "scarf" on your back, carefully tied at the front. I guess the Boy Scouts and the Hitler Youth had similar stages in their rite of passage. It certainly taught me the reliability of comradeship and responsibility towards and for the benefit of, the Group. Maybe it is still possible to pinpoint the date – I was one of those who planted trees behind the brand new building that had become our "Ken" [ "nest" ]. We were often out on night games out in the hills. A major aim was to collectively attempt and hopefully to succeed, to steal the flag of the "other group". On one occasion I returned home at the end of a camp fortnight away and told my mother that from then on she was to make the cocoa just as it was in camp – it was so superior. Later she learned and related to me, that the difference lay in the fact that she used only milk for the drink, while in camp water was used instead. That particular summer camp was cut short because one of the kids drowned in

the river at which we were camping. Unquestioningly we were taught Patriotism and Zionism. Others may use the term “brain-washed” but I see only the positive. The fact remains that as I grew up and began to think more for myself I shied away from “Zionism”. Our heroes tended to be those who did something spectacular for the nation. Right now the ones that come to mind are Joseph Trumpeldor and Hanna Szenes. Two very different characters from each other. Trumpeldor was one of the early Russian immigrants, with Russian military training, who created the Kibbutzim in the Galil. He organised the military defences there – the so-called Wall and Tower defences and trained farmers to farm the fields with a rifle on their shoulder. They moved around on horseback. He was eventually killed in Tel-Chai in the far north of the Galil where a monument to him exists. It is the image of a lion without a head. Some mournful songs about those exploits were part of our Repertoire. Another was Hanna Szenes.

[Wikipedia: *Hannah Szenes* (Hebrew: חַנָּה סֶנֶזֶס) (Hungarian: *Szenes Anikó*) (July 17, 1921 – November 7, 1944) was a Hungarian Jew, one of 37 Jews living in Palestine, now Israel, who were trained by the British army to parachute into Yugoslavia during the Second World War in order to help save the Jews of Hungary, who were about to be deported to the German death camp at Auschwitz. Szenes was arrested at the Hungarian border, imprisoned and tortured, but she refused to reveal details of her mission and was eventually tried and executed by firing squad. She is regarded as a national heroine in Israel, where several streets and a kibbutz are named after her and her poetry is widely known. ] I guess that every Israeli child knows her poem “Ashrei Hagafrur” – lucky is the match which was kindled and kindled a [camp] fire or her “Eli, Eli” = My God, my God, may it never end poem/prayer. One of the many immigrant ships which arrived in Palestine at the end of 1945 was named after her. It was beached at Nahariya.]

We also learned the reality of life in Palestine. I cannot recall the name of our leader – could I ever remember names??? – but I know the house in Masada Street in which he lived and where once or twice a week we would meet. He could not have been much more than 17/18 years old and owned the most beautiful, well trained and obedient Alsatian dog. One day our world fell apart. Our leader had fallen. It was then that I learned that he had been a member of the Haganah, he had gone out at night on some mission and was killed. Thinking of it now it was more likely that it was this which brought an end to my membership of the Hashomer Hazair. I remember vaguely that there was no one else to take his place – neither in practice nor in our hearts. I no longer remember the date – but it was before the 1948 declaration of Independence.

Using my hands is something I seem not to have bequeathed to my children in too great a measure. Maybe now, when they have set up their own homes some of this will still come out. I derive such great satisfaction from using my hands to create things and really fail to understand that everyone else does not necessarily emulate me. We, as children, would not have possessed things if we did not make them ourselves. We could never replace anything, so it was obvious that it had to be repaired. Just because today I have the supply and the money, does not change the fact that “one does not do that” ! Growing up in Haifa meant that I was living in a Mediterranean climate. As kids we played mainly outdoors with others on the block. We had no TV, no computer. If you wanted a gun – and who did not? – you had to make yourself one. A stick from the old olive tree on the hillside, thick enough so that you could hammer in a nail to fasten the two ends of a bit of elastic, usually cut out of an old, discarded inner tube of some vehicle.... Higher up the stick you carved another hole through which a small stick was inserted, to act as a trigger. This was in fact a catapult, but to us was a rifle. Target practice took a lot of

time. It never worked well, thank goodness, otherwise these things would have been lethal. But the point here is simply to explain – we had very few toys and made our own.



*Red Indians – Eli on the left shoeless, Yermly on the right*

In my house were several other boys. We often played together, but were not really close friends. Upstairs, above me was Yermly Tillinger, on the same floor as me Yoav Gottfried, a little younger than I was, downstairs lived Bendror Karsch and in the adjacent apartment Eli Levinson. Bendror, being the oldest, was clearly the leader of our troop.. In the Karsh and Levinson households there was always shouting and anger. Mr Levinson used his belt and severely abused both his wife and child. Eli had been born with only a thumb properly developed on his left hand and really suffered throughout his childhood. He never cried when we were around and we all pretended that we did not know what was happening. Only once do I remember Eli's mother seeking shelter with Ima.

A game - "Masmer" - a 6-inch, but better 8-inch nail, held by its head point upwards and spun onto the slightly muddy ground so that as the point reached the ground it sank into the ground and stayed there. We each had a base [a 15 cm circle scratched into the mud] and had to have three such throws to make a perfect line before we could advance onto an opponent's territory along this created

“path”. There were other complicated rules which I no longer remember. But I do remember being quite good at the game. It was always played so that one knee supported your weight on the ground. I still have the scar above my left knee where a nail lodged there one day, by mistake, of course. That was in Huggim School, Pevzner Street, long before it moved onto the new site on the Carmel, close to the lunatic asylum.

Another favourite game was marbles. An indent sunk into the ground became our “base” from which to attack the opponents’ marbles. I was not bad at it, but clearly remember how much better others were...

Another self-assembled game was actually lethal. You required a key which had a hollow shaft, preferably quite a thick one. Then you found a nail, just smaller than the diameter of this hollow shaft and the heads of the key and nail were tied together with a piece of string. Next you needed a box of matches. Carefully the match heads were scraped off and the collected material [ no wood!! That was a contaminant.] inserted into the key shaft, with the nail point keeping the charge in place. Now you swung the assembly against a hard surface – vertical or horizontal and enjoyed the explosion which ensued when you struck the surface. Frequently that was the last act which the keys could ever perform as their thin walls were ripped apart by the blast.... A little later in our lives we matured into dismantling a revolver or rifle bullet and using the gunpowder instead of the match heads. We sure were inventive – or at least one of us was, the rest just copied in total ignorance....

Most of our communal games used balls – no football game was played, we did not have the space. “Machanayim” in which two square areas are each populated by a team with one of their team members behind the opposing team’s camp and you try to hit the people in the camp. If they do not catch the ball [football

sized] they are “out” The other was “Kaddur Hakkafa” [rounders or base ball]. Oh yes – footballs were the real thing in those days, not the synthetic stuff my children had to play with. – a real leather outer and rubber inner looking rather like a balloon, which had to be pumped up. The ends of the balloons had to be sealed properly so that air did not escape and then somehow wedged under the leather without causing damage. Even more difficult was the need to close the slit through which you fitted the inner, rather like doing up a shoe lace, only you could not have the ends flapping about. They had to be forced under the lacing with nothing left to protrude. It was an art which I found difficult to master. There was a special tool which I possessed: an awl with which to pull these lace ends in but the danger was that it poked a puncture into the inner. The awl was also used to re-sew the outer hexagonal patches as their stitching began to give way. We often found that the leather was fraying at these edges and then either found an old pair of shoes which could be cut out to create a new patch or else accepted that the ball would become a little out of shape as one or other of the hexagon-edges were trimmed.... The other vital part of the kit was the rubber solution and the patches for repairing the punctures both on footballs and on bicycles.

We also had a somewhat costly [to others!] game – Chess. Of course none of us had proper chess pieces and so we stole vehicle inner tube air valve covers and made up complete and recognisable chess sets. The variety of pneumatic valve covers in those days was astounding. There were those which were just simple covers – they were the pawns. Others had a parallel slit in them with which to unscrew the innards of the valve – those were the rooks. There were also, of course, others which were quite elaborate and represented the King, Queen, Knights and Bishops. If you did not have a full set, you could always swap – 8 pawns for a King and so on. The girls played “Klass”. A flat stone, preferably a piece of marble, was pushed across the ground with your shoe



while hopping on one foot, with many elaborate rules. While younger the boys also played this game. We even did so bare-foot at times and you had to be very careful to push the stone only with the side of your foot – NOT the toes! Then came the fad of 5-stones – all were games which we could improvise and use the materials available to be found [and I accept that stealing was stealing and not “finding”!]

There were very many more such games which we played – all “created” out of owning nothing. The important point here is that we children learned so much from the fact that we had so few manufactured toys. It was a stimulus to a socialising and an inventiveness which I feel is sadly lacking in children of later generations. It never occurred to us that we were “poor” and we certainly had a happy childhood. The importance of a kite is its creation out of sticks, paper and string – not the flying thereof. Does anyone still make their own???

I have often regretted that my children were not able in England to enjoy the outdoor life which was my element at that stage. We roamed the hills, went swimming in the sea. There was clearly a battle between the duties of homework and the lure of your friends calling from outside. There was always a race to see who of us would show the first white underpants. That needs an explanation. We would run around in shorts and sandals. maybe swimming trunks and the “white underpants” were the areas covered up which did not brown in the sun. Not a thought in those times about the possible consequences of too much sun... It took several seasons to learn when you had had enough – that was just before it burned you and you always resented a parent who told you to “go and put something on.”

It seems strange how my memories now are of sunny days, nothing really comes to mind about winter. The occasional gift parcels which came from England were of particular importance. When grandmother came to visit

she brought with her a suitcase full of cheese, salami, milk and egg powders – riches I had never seen before. Best of all, she brought me a geometry set – I finally had a real compass for my geometry lessons. It is still in my desk drawer today.

## 1948 – an Independent Israel

The Declaration of Independence occurred on 14 May 1948. Naturally it was accompanied by much emotion. The “real stuff” went over my head – I was not yet of an age where I would be personally involved. I do remember sitting at the radio, listening to the UN vote, for, or against, a Jewish State. No matter that our homeland was to be partitioned, parcelled up into small, unconnected bits and pieces, some not connecting to the rest. There were, of course, huge celebrations. People poured into the streets and danced our national folkdances till they dropped. Ima sat at home and wept. She foresaw only danger and strife, wanted to remain in the “safety” of being part of the British Empire – not that the Mandate was “Empire”. It is difficult to describe how total strangers of all ages streamed out, shouting and joking and laughing, holding hands and kicking their legs as the circles went round and round and more concentric circles formed as the outer ones became too big.

While we were dancing, the first shots could be heard. Suddenly, as if by some “magic” the town was divided into Arab and Jewish. Suddenly you were in danger of being hit by a sniper hidden somewhere in ambush and they aimed to kill. The radio reported invasions of Arab armies from all sides except the sea. In Haifa the Arabs had little chance of winning. By dint of history they had congregated in the lower town, in the harbour area, the wadis to the east and the Atlit coastline to the south-west. The Jews held the higher ground. They were the ones who had invested and built for many years the newer, “modern town” and as the lower part was already occupied, it was obvious that they went to the unsettled areas higher up. So it was that the fighting in Haifa itself did not last very long. My father was at that time driving the bus which connected the Hadar with the lower town. Someone threw a hand grenade at his bus.

He saw it out of the corner of his eye, swerved and it hit the corner of the bus body from where it bounced off.

Soon all buses would be armoured, we were in a siege.

Maybe I ought to say something about the buses and the trucks in those days. Because of the sniping it was exceedingly dangerous to travel in them anywhere where Arabs were living. Then someone devised the Israeli Armoured Vehicle. All buses and trucks were, bit by bit, fitted with steel plate across the windows, so that only a very small aperture was left from which one could look out. Of course armour piercing bullets were no match for these, but on the whole they did afford a degree of protection and saved lives.



*buses were similarly "armoured"*

I am including this here for the historical aspect from <http://www.blogcatalog.com/blog/haifa-history> which is beyond my detailed knowledge. This turns out to be a Bahai web site – a religion and a people persecuted in Iran and other Arab countries, who buried their leader in Haifa and made Haifa their holy city:

*The Haganah's force consisted of 5 companies from the Field Corps, one Palmach company, as well as a contingent of the Guard Corps. The Jewish forces attacked Wadi Salib and Wadi Nisnas from Hadar HaCarmel, while the bulk of the attack on Khalisa came from Neve Sha'anani. The Arab headquarters were in the centre of the city, near the port and the railway depot.*

*Commenting on the use of 'psychological warfare broadcasts' and military tactics in Haifa, Benny Morris writes:*

*Throughout the Haganah made effective use of Arabic language broadcasts and loudspeaker vans. Haganah Radio announced that 'the day of judgement had arrived' and called on inhabitants to 'kick out the foreign criminals' and to 'move away from every house and street, from every neighbourhood occupied by foreign criminals'. The Haganah broadcasts called on the populace to 'evacuate the women, the children and the old immediately and send them to a safe haven'... Jewish tactics in the battle were designed to stun and quickly overpower opposition; demoralisation was a primary aim. It was deemed just as important to the outcome as the physical destruction of the Arab units. The mortar barrages and the psychological warfare broadcasts and announcements and the tactics employed by the infantry companies, advancing from house to house, were all geared to this goal. The orders of Carmeli's 22nd Battalion were 'to kill every [adult male] Arab encountered' and to set alight with fire-bombs 'all objectives that can be set alight. I am sending you posters in Arabic; disperse on route'.*

*John Kimche also describes the "psychological blitz on Arab quarters" until "the Arab nerve broke and the flight from the town assumed panic proportions". The first attack was on the Rushmiyya Bridge area cutting the Arab areas off. Prior to the main thrust from the higher ground, of the Jewish neighbourhood, Hadar*

*HaCarmel, the Arab Muslim neighborhood of Khalisa came under mortar shell bombardment. The 3,500-5,000 Arab irregulars could not mount a real defense. The following day the Arab National Committee of Haifa were prepared to ask for a truce via Stockwell. Stockwell agreed to meet with the Israelis and returned 15 minutes later; however, the terms proposed by the Haganah -- complete disarmament, surrender of weapons and a curfew -- were not accepted by the Arab leadership.*

*\* 1. After the release of prisoners from Haifa lock-up, the Arab legion took over the building some time later.*

*\* 2. By 10:15, Arab casualties had been admitted to the Amin Hospital.*

*\* 3. Hospital staff and casualties were then evacuated to the Government Hospital in the city.*

*\* 4. Towards Midday, the fighting slackened considerably. The Jews had complete control of the Xhamra square and Stanton Street and were firing from positions in the Suq (market) area. They have also appeared in strength in the eastern quarter of the town from Wadi Husimiyah Bridge to Tel Amal.*

*\* 5. Arab women, children and others were still being evacuated from the Suq area through the port of Haifa and other safe areas.*

*\* 6. Arabs were by this time suing for a truce and the Jews replied that they were prepared to consider it if the Arabs stopped shooting.*

*\* 7. At 17:00 general Arab resistance had ceased in the eastern area with the exception of a few isolated spots and the Jews were in possession of the Suq as far as the eastern gate.*

*\* 8. In the Wadi Miamr area the battle was still going on. Arab casualties in this area are believed to be considerable*

*\* 9. At 18:00 the Arab leaders met to consider final terms laid down at a joint meeting of Arab and Jews.*

*That afternoon, a meeting was held in the town hall to discuss terms of the truce. Due to the inability of the National Committee (Haifa) being unable to guarantee that no incidents would occur, the Arab delegation declared their inability to endorse the proposed truce and requested protection for the evacuation of Haifa's Palestinian Arab citizens. It was noted by The Times that the Haganah had made use of Arabic language broadcasts using Haganah Radio and loudspeaker vans calling on the inhabitants to 'kick out the foreign criminals'. Similarly the Haganah had broadcast that the Palestinian Arab population should 'evacuate the women, the children and the old immediately and sent them to a safe haven'.*

*By the April 22, 1948 the British were only in control of the Haifa port area. The rest of the city was in the hands of the Carmeli Brigade of the Haganah, commanded by Moshe Carmel.*

*The banner headlines of the Palestine Post on April 23 1948 announced "Haifa Pivotal Points fall to Haganah forces in 30 hour battle"... the report continued that Haganah crushed all resistance, occupied many major buildings forcing thousands of Arabs to flee by the only open route-the sea". The report was written up on the 21 April but not printed until the 30 April, presumably for security reasons.*

## 1948 – 1952 the difficult times

My fortnightly visits to my father's new home were hateful. I hated being there, hated the shrill voice of Hanna, hated the fact that I could only go there if I brought the food coupons with me, otherwise she would not feed me. There were three good things in that household – an Alsatian dog called Ratz, a bicycle and a half sister, "Rali" who was born on 27 Jan 1949. It was to visit these that I went and I spent the vast majority of the time outside on the bike with other kids on the block in Neve Shaanan. As she grew up, I would also have Rali on my bike. I really loved that sister and could not imagine that one day our paths would part irrevocably because she saw her mother in such a different way to the way I saw her. My father had decided to leave the bus cooperative. With the money that was paid out [his membership share] he purchased the small house in Neve Shaanan and established a "Kol-Bo" (something akin to a "general store" today, literally it means "everything in it"). It was a large "double shop". From time to time I accompanied my father on his trips to buy in goods from wholesalers. On some occasions I also stood behind the counter and served the customers – as did Hanna. She was a gymnastics teacher, evidently a good one and gave private lessons to small groups. For that purpose some equipment was bought and a largish room in the flat converted to a gym – complete with a training "ladder" fixed to the wall and two rings fixed to the ceiling.. I too used these when there. I also learned to "walk on the rollers" – a wooden roll under bare feet to strengthen the arches. But in the main I escaped from the house and was out on the road on the bicycle. The huge advantage to Neve Shaanan in this respect was the fact that it was a plateau on the Carmel Hills extension and therefore bike friendly, unlike the Hadar where we lived, half way up the hill. Alone, or with others, we would ride our bikes in Neve-Shaanan and eventually got more daring [and good at it] and went further to the Carmel itself and even into Haifa. However, going into Haifa also meant that you had eventually to



return to Neve Shaanan and that was a very long way uphill all the way. I remember clearly one of these days. It was hot. All I wore was shorts and a vest, not even shoes. My father's bungalow was down a chalky-white long path at 90-degrees to the main street. Just where that street's pavement [un-tarred, of course] ended and where that path actually started was a protruding galvanised mains water pipe. The path formed a bridge to the street at that point, as it crossed the roadside ditch. It must have been late spring. The flowers were out in the fields – and in that ditch – and so were the stinging nettles. I came at speed off that street and turned the sharp 90-degrees onto the path. The tyre slipped on the galvanised pipe and I fell into the ditch amidst all those nettles. Not only was my skin scraped extensively, but I had nettles rubbed into the wounds. It burnt like hell, but then, nettles have, apparently, an antiseptic quality.

1948-1949 were particularly difficult times. We were in the middle of a war. Many new immigrants arrived, some ended up in my school class. Often our teachers were “away”. Food was scarce and everything was rationed, if available at all. Without coupons you could not get anything – no clothing, no shoes, no household goods, never mind food. Can my children ever understand that when I outgrew my shoes, the front was cut away and they were called “sandals” ? Every now and again my father would give me a garment which he was selling in his shop. Particularly coveted were the blue shorts, because all else was khaki in colour. He was one of a few “registered” outlets for underwear and simple clothing and had a direct supply from the Ata Textile Company. It put him into a position of power, because all those who came into the shop were beholden to him for supplying them with that which was scarce. At one time he gave me some grey underwear. I was so pleased – it was real grown-ups workers’ work-wear. Ima was disgusted, she would not have me seen in such garb!

As kids we too, from time to time were asked to help the economy, to do our bit for the country. As the vast majority of Officers in the forces came from the Kibbutzim [ a very interesting sociological fact, as the Kibbutz Movement and way of life, despite being only 2% of the Jewish population, created a rather special breed of people compared with the rest of the population ] we were occasionally bussed to such a Kibbutz and helped on the farm there. I remember those trips to the Jezre'el Valley [was it Nahalal itself ? – I cannot recall ] where we picked Victoria plums. We were allowed to eat a few and were very careful not to damage the rest of the fruit. The “best” was sent for export, the general population got the second best in all things. It was part of the cost of building a new nation. On one occasion the bus which had taken us in the morning to the Kibbutz was late returning to Haifa. It had already gotten dark. In order to get home we needed to cross Arab territory from where snipers operated. We were fine, we knew nothing had happened, but there was a real commotion at the school where the parents had gathered, not knowing why the children had not returned at the arranged time. That was long before the mobile phone, of course.

On another occasion I was allocated the job of cleaning out [mucking out?] the cow shed. I had never been near a cow before, let alone worked in that atmosphere, but luckily my sense of smell was lousy, so that did not bother me at all. Nor did the fact that we waded in cow excrement bother me. I have never been squeamish of such “natural” dirt and knew that at the end of the process I could hose off and eventually take a shower. I did learn to milk the cows as well, a process which stood me in good stead when many years later I was in Serfaus, Tirol and the local farmer's cow strayed near the swimming pool at which we were having fun. I took some poor unsuspecting girl's swimming hat and used it as the container into which I milked the cow. Never did milk taste more delicious and as far as pasteurising was concerned, had anyone ever heard of that before???

With all that hardship and troubled times, there were also positive aspects. I remember many people flocking to listen to a lecture by Professor Loudermilk who called for a pipeline to be laid from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea and with which to generate Hydro-Electrical power. Afterwards we even discussed it in school, it was part of our general and wide ranging education. 60 years on it still seems a good idea, but now probably much more difficult to execute because so much of that waste land is now built on.

We were sitting at lunch in the garden in 2009 on one of those relatively rare occasions when it was dry and warm enough to do so. From the Totteridge Green came the sounds of a loudspeaker addressing the crowd there. For me it triggered the memory of election fever of 1949. That year was important nationally. That was the year in which the first national elections took place for the 1<sup>st</sup> Knesset of Independent Israel. Before then things had “just happened”. Unlike any other country that I am aware of, the Jews had created all sorts of communal institutions while being ruled by the British and naturally there were three streams – the extreme left, the left and the right. They had established the “Jewish Agency” which organised communal life and was, in effect an unelected Government. It was they who came to make the declaration of Independence and they who took the reins of government as the British departed. It was they too who organised the purchase of arms for the Hagana. There were also a lot of other voluntary smaller institutions – for example the Magen David Adom, [Jewish red cross ] and things like homes for destitute women and children, the eradication of tuberculosis etc. etc. The blue and white Keren Kayemet box was everywhere and on Fridays we school children were encouraged to bring some money and deposit this in that tin box. The JNF printed its own series of non-postage stamps which were “sold” to the public by way of recognition of a contribution but were also used as the

stamp to authenticate documents. My school reports, for example, each have such a JNF stamp. Each of these institutions was run very democratically with elections to the committees, the recognition of memberships and so on. Now in 1949 the first National Elections were carried out in which all citizens had a right to vote for a member of their own parliament. The place exploded with election fever. There were, of course, endless parties. Each was allocated a certain letter of the alphabet. Alef was Mapai – the workers Party headed by people such as Chaim Weitzman and David Ben Gurion. Mem was the Left-leaning, not yet communist but near to that workers party. Chet was Cherut – the right-wing party of Menachem Begin and the Etzel Underground. They all printed little publicity slips maybe 3" x 4" which we kids collected avidly. The aim was to collect a full set!



Courtesy Wikimedia.org: Israel voting slips

Danielle sent an email which I find so moving. It concerns the subject of me, so many times, having been several years ahead of our time in various ways.

She wrote:

*From: "Dr&Mrs D. EPURESCU"*

*<epurescu@tiscali.co.uk>*

*To: "'David Lewin'" <davidlewin@btinternet.com>*

*Subject: How times change!*

*Date: Sun, 4 Feb 2007 22:22:11 -0000*

*Hi Dad, you've probably heard that in future, children will be able to choose between French and Arabic, amongst others. Bet you didn't realise that when you were studying Arabic French, you were 60 years ahead of the times! Love dx*

The language part of her e-mail refers to my time at the Huggim school in Haifa, when we had to decide on the 2<sup>nd</sup> foreign language which we would take up after English. We were a class full of "Yekkes" and East European Jews and so when Yair Katz, our headmaster whom I remember mostly from our counting in each of his attendances of the number of times he said "cain" [yes] - offered us the choice of French and Arabic, all of us, without exception, opted for French. Naturally the school could not sustain that, after all they employed Mr Dana, a superb Arabic teacher whom all feared – and so Katz divided us into those doing French and those learning "Arabic-French", as he called it. The result was that I never really learned Arabic or French, to my great regret. English was considered an absolute must and for a while Ima arranged for me to have additional private lessons with a Mrs Kluberg in Masada Street. I wonder now whether this was because Ima tried to prepare me for a life in England. It certainly never crossed my mind then.

1950 was the year I had my Bar Mitzvah. I really wanted to do it and caused quite a problem for my mother because we were not members of any synagogue and it was going to prove too costly to hold a party for many people when the time came. In the event it all came through – party and all and my rite of passage into Judaism was confirmed.

I was given a teacher who took me through the Torah and Haftarah portions, chanting, of course. I remember the reading on the day itself as if it were yesterday – but only the reading. Everything else, the party, premises, guest list – that is all gone. One photograph of me survived, in Talit and Tfilin. I think I continued the practice for one week after the day itself and after that “laid them only in the cupboard” as we often said gleefully.



*Bar Mitzvah*

The reading itself was amazing. I was trembling as I went up to the podium. But when I opened my mouth to start

the blessing, everything around me vanished and I was totally concentrated on the task at hand. When I had finished it was as though I had come out of a trance and rejoined the people in the Synagogue at the time. I do not think I have ever experienced this again. I cannot claim that I have wanted to feel this again. The fact was that it happened and on rare occasions the memory returns. Was it spiritual?? I do not think so. It was total concentration and the complete shutting off of all that was happening around me. I know that I am far too practical a person and see things from their functionality and logic points of view, not their aesthetics. Nevertheless, it is clear even to me that this “black hole” into which I had retreated while reading my liturgical portions made a deep impression on me. I could recite it all again tomorrow. I certainly still have the melody ringing in my head and still know the bulk of the portion off by heart. Somehow the “Nachamu” – be consoled – of Isaiah was of special meaning to me. He gave hope to its people at a difficult time and 1950 sure was such a period.

My Oma disapproved of the way I was being brought up. As far as she was concerned children had to obey, do as they were told. I was reasoned with and expressed my opinions. In 1949 she came once to Israel to visit us – the occasion of my Bar Mitzvah. Ima had taken me swimming in a swimming pool, grandmother cooked lunch and we were late returning. Grandmother was furious. Ima explained that I had been teaching her to dive into the water [ I think my children will understand this, they experienced it as well ] and that I refused to leave the pool until she had mastered it. Oma’s retort, in a rather disgusted voice was “Really! When the child says jump, you jump!”

Snow was something we observed only from afar, on Mount Hermon. In winter Jerusalem would occasionally see a dusting of it, but that was nearly as far away as the Lebanon. You can imagine therefore our reaction when in

February 1950 a major snowfall carpeted Haifa. It was the first time that I had seen such a phenomenon and there was lots of it. In my memory it was 1 meter high, though knowing how the size of the town itself has shrunk when I re-visited it, it may have been considerably less. I cannot find the photo which I wanted here – we Arlosorov kids tobogganing down the then invisible Koresh steps to Hillel Street. The only one I can find shows me in “winter gear” on that day:



*Haifa in the snow*

Maybe one day I can replace this picture. I do not recognize the trees in the background.

When I was a child and was asked “what do you want to be one day” my answer was always “I do not know, but I do not want to be a bus driver”. I came home and told my mother I had made a decision. I wanted to become a pilot. She looked at me, silent for a minute and then said “What? You? You want to become a bus driver in the air?”. With



that she knocked this ambition on the head. In any case, at 15 I left Israel. I wanted to become an Aeronautical Engineer but in England, where I went for an interview with the de Havilland Aircraft Company, that was closed to me. It required not only a UK birth certificate (which I had), but also that both your parents were British born. Mine were decidedly not.

At I guess around 12 or so I joined the Air Cadets, run by the Israel Air Force. We built balsawood models but had to first draw the designs onto the wood ourselves. No kits in those days! It was the culmination of several years in which we had been taught the basics of aerodynamics, technical drawing and woodwork. We actually drew, copied onto balsa wood and then cut out and assembled model gliders and eventually little powered craft using either rubber bands wound round and round (which tended to twist the fuselage as well as rotate the propeller) or even small petrol engines, but these were very costly. I thought it "sissy" when I arrived in England to find such models ready made in boxes. All you could do with these was to cut them out and assemble them! At 15 I went to the first residential military camp in Ein Hod, then the HQ of the Israel Air Force, not far from Tel Aviv, in which we did our first gliding course and had the opportunity to have a go on a single-seater pulled by a winch over the sand dunes towards the sea. Initially we had to remain stationary on the ground and learn to use the control to keep the wings absolutely horizontal in the wind that was blowing onshore from the sea. I never got higher than a couple of meters, but it taught us the rudiments of the controls. I also never completed the gliding course with little reverence for the military discipline imposed on us at the camp. Someone made a "dare" which another boy and I took up – we were to run naked through the camp irrespective of the fact that there were also girls in the group. We were, of course, caught and stopped and a disciplinary enquiry was held. Both of us were sent home early. Ima was actually relieved – she hated the idea of her son gliding above ground. That

was shortly before we left Israel, which in any case brought an end to my aviation career.

Summer holidays were rather long – two and a half months - and money was scarce. Once I had reached the age of being able to bear responsibility, I began in a small way to try to contribute to the home income. I remember during a couple of summer vacations working for a book wholesaler, just off Herzl Street. That is where I first learned to properly wrap parcels of books – to crease the paper properly so that it neatly fitted around the book. No Sellotape in those days, you used string. Another big advantage of working in that business was that I could acquire the necessary school books at a discount. Every new school year was accompanied by the tension of needing to spend money. It was not just that books were expensive. Rationing and scarcity meant that we could not get them and teachers were not happy if you did not have the required volumes at the beginning of the year. There was a lively trade in 2<sup>nd</sup> hand books. We always had to keep our books in good condition so that they should retain as high a re-sale value as possible. For a while it got so bad that exercise books were cut in half for us to share. Paper was a very scarce commodity altogether. For toilet paper we used newspapers cut up to the appropriate size and held together by a string threaded through a hole which we dug in one corner or, if we could get hold of it, the “luxus” version, the wrappers of oranges used in the export crates – not, of course, those oranges sold to the population.

## **1952 – the year of the “Yored”**

In 1952 my mother had reached a point where the struggle to survive in an economy of lack of work opportunities, constant war and severe food rationing meant that it really was much more sensible to leave Israel and emigrate to England where her parents had arrived in late 1938 and where her 2 brothers lived. She had tried to make the break once before in 1948. Israel had been declared an independent State, she wept with fear and apprehension on the night when the whole nation was dancing the Horah in the streets. I refused point blank to leave my country at that time. But by 1952 it was different. I was struggling at school. I had ended up a year in which I nearly had to repeat a class because I was that bad. I was given a bunch of extra tutoring and actually ended up with an aggregate of “Maspik” notes (= sufficient, but in reality not good enough). I declared: “what do you want, Maspik zeh Maspik” (Sufficient is sufficient) and was very clear in my mind that this was not the case. I had always been a good student. I had no trouble in comprehending any subject which we learned. Clearly I was under the influence of puberty coupled with a lack of a 2-parent home, teachers often away from class “somewhere on duty” (a euphemism for active military training in the armed forces of a would-be State) and adolescent disinterest in the disciplines needed for learning.

I have found an old folder in which Ima had kept all my school reports from 1943 to 1952.

I had not remembered for quite how long my marks had been deteriorating and the information is stark. In the first three years I had only “Very Good” and “Good” marks, with the exception only of Handwriting and Drawing – which came up with “Maspik”. In 1946/47 as well as 47/48 there were still mainly “very good,” “good” and “almost good” but

Maths got a “Maspik” as well as, of course, handwriting and drawing.

1948/49 saw the start of the deterioration, “almost good” predominated

1950/51 not even behaviour, listening, participation, attentiveness had a good mark anymore and in 1951/52 I hit rock bottom. There is a note from April 52 to say that there was doubt whether I would be allowed into the next class [ which eventually I was] and in June a note that I had to sit a supplementary exam in algebra.

The difference between the memory and documented facts is interesting to me, because I clearly accepted the bad in the last year in Haifa and believed myself to have been OK in all the years before that.



*1952, farewell to Haifa*

There is a proverb in Hebrew “meshane makkom, meshane mazzal”, a change in location changes one’s fortune. I too saw that a change of climate would make sense and so in

June 1952 we emigrated on board an Israeli Zim Line cargo ship "Rimmon".

The Rimmon was the pride of the Israeli Merchant Fleet in those days. As a cargo boat they carried only 12 fee paying passengers, all first class only.

To this day I still get the real, physical sensation of my eyes opening wider and wider to the point where they would have to tear in the corners, at the site of the food-laden table in the dining room of that ship. It was the first manifestation of the Plenty that was England (and here it was like nothing compared with, say, the USA). It was on the Rimmon too that I absolutely refused to wear a tie, demanded of me because we were sitting at the Captain's table. I preferred to forgo the meal rather than comply and suffocate myself with that attire. We went on this Cargo boat because it went right into the Port of London where my grandparents could meet us. On the way we stopped twice, in Larnaka and Limasol, loading the stone which England would convert into Vim – I think from Limasol. We were anchored in the bay as there was no harbour there at that time. All the materials were taken to the ship on the back of boats and barges. As we were looking at the island and I had nothing better to do, feeling bored and hot, I dived off the ship and swam the considerable distance to the shore. A policeman was waiting there for me and he sent me straight back to the ship. Presumably he considered me to be a potential illegal immigrant. Little did he know that I hated that island. That was where his ilk had kept my people in detention camps instead of allowing them free passage to Palestine. I also remember going through the Straits of Messina, seeing Etna erupting in the darkness and that amazing red glow of lava flowing. Much less pleasant was the crossing of the Bay of Biscay with the ship rolling in all directions and people hanging over the railings, if they managed to get that far. The funny thing is that I do not remember being sick myself. I learned that you have to eat to ward off sea sickness and to look at the

horizon, not the towering waves. The only problem was the fact that the horizon kept moving enormous distances. Later in life I was a much worse sea traveller!

My grandparents awaited us in London on the dock in the eastern part of town and we left the ship immediately without waiting for our luggage. That would follow. My mother had packed a galvanized steel trunk I guess 5ft x 3ft x 2 ft which must have arrived in Palestine with her from Germany. It was always stored on the smallest of our balconies. We were to see it again a full year later after it was found by accident aboard the Rimmon which had been to Japan via Alaska in the meantime. Most of the contents were mouldy....

A word here on leaving Israel:

The first time my mother spoke of wanting – or rather having to leave Israel was in 1948. I absolutely refused to leave my homeland. It was not that I had contributed much, except for the odd trip to a Kibbutz to help on the farm, but love of home and country was writ very large in our makeup. No way would I abandon ship. There was a real stigma attached to those who left. They were called “Yordim” [going down] in contrast to the “Olim” [going up] – the new immigrants arriving in Israel. A “Yored” was seen as a traitor, one who preferred a cushy life for himself abroad, where there was no hardship, no war, no food rationing, one who was not prepared to carry out his duty, a rat leaving the ship. In a large way that attitude was right and justified. It, of course, allowed no space whatsoever for the individual causes and reasons which brought about the decision to leave. Now, 60 years on, we see Israelis everywhere in the world. I would guess there now are as many Israeli nationals living away from there as in the country itself.

I have not heard the word Yored spoken for a long time. It is hard to describe the reality which drove us out of the

country. There was physical danger because of the constant state of war, there was continuing and severe food rationing or "Tsena" as it was called. Not the "Tsena" as in the war-time song calling upon the girls to come out and meet the soldier, the then only Israeli song which was translated into so many languages and made its way around the world. The "Tsena" here has a different Hebrew word-root and means Austerity. There was half a chicken once a fortnight per family. The joke told at the time was encapsulated in the question "How do you know that in Israel all chicken have two heads?" and the answer was that it was obvious, because irrespective of which half of that chicken you got, it always came with the head.

Here a piece from Wikipedia on the subject:

### ***Rationale***

*Shortly after its establishment in 1948, the young state of Israel found itself lacking in both food and foreign currency. In three and a half years, the Jewish population of Israel had doubled, inflated by nearly 700,000 immigrants. At the same time, the Arab villages, once major suppliers of food to the Jews of the land, were no longer in a position to do so, due to changes in political and settlement situations after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Subsequently, the government of Israel decided that to ensure ample rations for all Israeli citizens, it would assume control of resources and distribute them equally. Aside from the provision of food, austerity was also required because the state was lacking in foreign currency reserves. Export revenues covered less than a third of the cost of imports and less than half of the consequent deficit was covered by Jewish loans called Magbiyot (Hebrew: מגביית, lit. Collections). Most financing was obtained from foreign banks and gas companies, which, as 1951 drew to an end, refused to enlarge the credit given to the state. In order to supervise austerity, the prime minister of the time, David Ben-Gurion, ordered the establishment of the Ministry of*

*Rationing and Supply (Hebrew: משרד הקיצוב והאספקה, Misrad HaKitzuv VeHaAspaka), headed by Dov Yosef.*

### ***Life under austerity***

*At first this rationing was set for staple foods alone — oil, sugar and margarine, for instance — but it was later expanded to furniture and footwear. Each month, each citizen would get food coupons worth 6 Israeli pounds and each family was allotted a given amount of foodstuffs. The diet chosen, fashioned after that used in the United Kingdom during World War II, allowed 2,800 calories a day for Israeli citizens, with additional calories for children, the elderly and pregnant women.*

*The enforcement of austerity required the establishment of a bureaucracy of quite some proportions, which nonetheless proved inefficient in preventing the emergence of a black market in which rationed products — often smuggled from the countryside — were sold at prices far higher than their worth. To counter this, the government established in September 1950 the Headquarters for Fighting the Black Market (Hebrew: מטה למלחמה בשוק השחור, Mateh LeMilhama BeShuk HaShahor), whose goal it was to combat the forming of such a market. Yet despite the increased supervision and the specially summoned courts, all such repression proved inefficient.*

### ***1952 Improvements***

*In 1952 an agreement was signed with Germany, compensating Israel for confiscation of Jewish property during the Holocaust. The resulting influx of foreign capital, a godsend to the state's struggling economy, led to the cancellation of most restrictions in 1953. In 1958 the list of rationed goods was narrowed to 11 goods in all and in 1959 rationing of all goods save jam, sugar and coffee, was abolished altogether.*



## **Results**

*Economically, austerity proved a failure, mostly due to the enormous government deficit, covered by bank loans, creating an increase in the amount of money using. Throughout austerity unemployment remained high and inflation grew as of 1951. Yet austerity did have its merits – none remained hungry and shelter was found for all immigrants, shabby though it may have been.*

Nowadays you cannot imagine that 60 years ago the chicken and fish came complete with their innards and feathers or scales, I certainly still know how to clean them and prepare them for cooking. I was also adept at sifting the rice for little stones and flour for weevils. In my mind I connected these activities with the story of Cinderella. Another task of mine, at an early age was to hold up the wool hanks between my two hands while Ima wound it into a ball. The arms had to be held up and moved from side to side so that the yarn came off smoothly without pulling with it several more twists, as yet unneeded loops. We lived on Chazilim [aubergine] and on yeast which was formed into all manner of food, tasting “just like” vegetables, chopped liver and endless other “just-likes” to remind you of foods from days gone by. Life was a real struggle – and yet I do not remember ever being hungry. My friend Benijah Bardi whom I only met after we got to England, told the story of his Bar Mitzvah gift. He reached that important day in Jerusalem in 1948. At that time Jerusalem was under siege. The only food and supplies to reach the city came in convoys of armoured vehicles which literally had to fight their way up the Bab el Wad valley, with very many casualties. Relief for Jerusalem only came after the building of the “Burma Road”, by-passing the Arab villages from where everything that moved in the valley was being shot. Anyway, to obtain his Bar Mitzvah gift Benijah’s parents walked for three hours each way and returned home with one egg!

Couple this background with the difficulty of earning a living, my very poor showing at school, Grandmother getting older and needing someone to look after her, England the “Land of Plenty”, the lure of her family there, the decision to leave would seem obvious. I felt the Hebrew Proverb “meshane makkom, meshane mazzal” - A change of location brings a change in good fortune. Little did my mother realize that she would be expected to go out to work as a “Domestic” because the family was not prepared to take her in in any other way and looking after grandmother was an addition to working as a Domestic. That was the cause for the rift between the siblings. It became even worse when it was decided to sell the Koebner home – No 2 Akenside Road in Hampstead, a large substantial house for a pokey 3 bed-roomed dry rot and wet rot as well as woodworm riddled semi detached house in Golders Green. I am not aware of all the pros and cons, but clearly the substantial difference in value between those two buildings must have been used to send me to a boarding school and for the uncles to get access to some cash while their mother was still alive. Ima was to inherit the house when Oma died. My mother had to do menial domestic work because of the Law of the Land – and not even her own family rallied round to help. She had been imported to become a maidservant for my grandmother.

## 1952 – Emigration to England

England was a shock to my system. In Israel people lived in flats (as opposed to houses in England). Compared with the rest of the population we had lived in a HUGE apartment in Haifa – it had three rooms! We arrived in England where the people in their houses had endless rooms. They had morning rooms, libraries, conservatories, dining rooms, lounges – endless. But the truth was that they had space for no one at all. It was often a matter of “you must come for tea” – a totally hollow and meaningless invitation that caused me much pain. I had been used to play and study and be proud in a group of kids of my own age, in a co-ed school where the teachers were known by their first names. Suddenly I was confronted by a grey society, wet from constant rain and fog, with prefects at school in a country whose language I had no command of. I was put in a boarding school – Whittingehame College - in Brighton. It went further than that. We ran around in shorts in Israel, mostly khaki. They were short! An especially nice shirt was white and we envied those who had a “Russian Shirt” buttoned down only half the front but offset to the left and embroidered. In England, on the other hand, little boys were made to run around in shorts, but these were disgusting  $\frac{3}{4}$  lengths, down to your knobbly knees. And then you had to wear long trousers, blazers and worst of all, ties!!!



*Bar Mitzvah photo – with Ima and my grandmother.  
Me in Russian shirt which I loved.*

## Good quality – an instinct

I have this slightly arrogant thing in me which KNOWS when something is of a good quality. That is an instinct - it is not learned. Examples of this are a few: When we first came to England and I had to adapt to English life and I needed my very first suit. I was 15 by then, had never possessed one. My mother took me to a shop where all the suits were hanging on hangers so that you could only see their shoulders and down one sleeve. An Army of suits! I walked up and down the rows feeling the cloth, not seeing the cut in any way and eventually returned to and stopped at one and said "that is the one I want". The salesman said rather sheepishly "well, that is the single most expensive suit in the shop!" I cannot even remember whether my mother actually bought it or not. I do remember that at about that time too we were visiting my mother's friends, the Warburgs [ Lisa Warburg was a former Carlebach from Haifa, had divorced and took her son Donald to London some years earlier when she married Mr. Warburg. Donald was sent to Haileybury school, a Public Boarding school and evolved into a pure Englishman on whom not a trace of Hebrew could be heard. But he also totally lost touch with his roots in Israel ] and Mr Warburg gave me a suit of his which he no longer used. I owned and used that suit for decades, until eventually the foam which was on the inside of the waistband disintegrated. Lisa was even more cleanliness crazy than my mother. There is that sweet story about the two. Ima was visiting Lisa in their posh flat and needed to use the bathroom. Lisa asked that after she had finished, Ima should use the cloth provided in order to dry the basin. "I can't" explained Ima, "because after I have used that cloth I need to wash my hands again". I have no idea how they resolved this conundrum.

Another example: we never drank alcohol because with me alcohol "defies the laws of gravity". It invariably goes

up instead of down. At one of our Bnai Brith meetings our group was having a cheese and wine tasting party organized by Harold Godfrey, who years later was to lose his life when aboard a plane in Malaysia which had a terrorist bomb on it. Until Lockerbie, it was the only plane bombed out of the sky by terrorists. I tasted a few of the samples and eventually told Harold the one I liked the best and yes, you have guessed it "that is the most expensive wine I have bought for tonight" explained Harold.

Before I studied engineering I seriously considered becoming a teacher. If I had, I would have taught mathematics and science. But, because I was not certain that I would be a good teacher AND because a bad mathematics teacher can ruin a child's life, I decided to become an engineer. I preferred - if I was to become a bad engineer - to lose some company a lot of money to ruining a child's life with bad teaching. Later I gave some mathematics private lessons. In one case I had a child who wanted to become a Sea Captain. It made no difference that he was told that he needed a university degree and mathematics in order to become a Captain. So I changed the whole of the mathematics to revolve around ships. You know, the ship when cut in half had a certain geometrical shape, the wind speed and direction of the smoke, the relative speed of the dolphins, the waves and the ship, the angle of vision of the sailor from the bridge of the ship - and so on. The child did well and began to learn. Many years later, when I was working in the "Job Club" I was teaching again - and loved it.

One of the first people whom I taught – mathematics – was Elisabeth Cornu. She was one of the three daughters of Paul and Yolande and they too lived in Golders Green. They were equally French as English. Elisabeth was named with an English pronunciation as a norm, but when admonished by her parents it was given the French accent. Yolande had been engaged by my Koebner grandparents as an au pair in their home in Ludwigshafen. She was

probably a few years older than my mother. My mother loved to tell the story of how Yolande, in preparing to learn how to announce guests arriving at the Koebner home, was coached by the two Koebner boys. Everyone who arrived had, of course, some sort of a title. So it was Dr this and Hofrath that. There was one particular person whom the boys disliked and by good fortune my grandmother overheard Yolande reciting aloud these various names and had just reached "Herr Oberarschloch .... ". [an extremely rude and vulgar German expression made to sound like an honourable title.] Another story associated with the Cornu family comes from the time when my mother was sent to visit them in France. She knew that toilet facilities in France were at best rudimentary so she packed a complete toilet seat (made from Leikorit by her father) into the top of her suitcase. Anyway, to come back to Elisabeth, it was here that I first realized that I really and fully understood a particular topic when I was able to make a student understand it – i.e. when I was able to teach it.

There was a young Israeli girl staying in our home for a while at the time. I no longer remember who she was or what her name was. I just recall a thin girl with the most thick and tightly curled black hair I had ever seen. She had come to study music and was hoping to find a room or apartment nearer to the college where she was to study. One day she came back and asked "Am I coloured?" "Why?" we asked, "what on earth makes you ask that question?" It transpired that she had been looking at notices for rooms to let and seen repeatedly "coloureds need not apply". The only other thing I remember about her was that I had offered her lessons in English and when she explained that she did not have the money to pay me for these, I naturally responded with "Oh no, I would do it for love". I need to add that we had made a pact that we would speak only in English in order to accelerate her learning. After that, for a few days, it was evident that something had soured in our relationship and it took some pushing to find out what. Eventually it transpired that I had

used an idiom which she did not recognize and which she had taken literally.

Quite early on the family decided that I should attend a boarding school. My mother was working as a “domestic” and there was no sensible way that I could stay with my ailing grandmother. The question arose what to do with that boy? An Interview was arranged for me at Taunton Boarding School. Several hours by train to Devon, a magnificent set of buildings with boys in a dapper uniform – it was like going to outer space. The only question I remember being asked was whether I knew Pythagoras’s Theorem. I had no idea what a theorem was. I think I had not yet covered that part of Geometry and so I failed that interview miserably. It was just as well. I could not possibly have survived going to that school even if I had known about the square on the hypotenuse. It was therefore decided that I should go to a “crammers” for a while. Davies Crammer’s were in West London, a long trip from NW London, but I did improve my English there. That is about all I remember of my time there. Eventually I was ready for a proper school.

In late 1952 I was admitted into Whittingehame College, Brighton: The school attempted to educate young Jewish persons on the lines of the British boarding school tradition. Its head was Jack Halevy, an ardent British Zionist with a deep gruff voice [“thank you, no, I will not take coffee, I only drink percolated coffee” was about the longest sentence he ever said to me as I offered him a cup, at a time when I was in sickbay and had the free run of the kitchenette there]. One was allocated to a class and to a house within the school and was supposed to show allegiance to that house. What a strange notion to someone from a co-ed school in which only your class deserved allegiance.. Visitors came once a term. There were three terms with halfterms in the middle. You were “expected” to write home once a week. The teachers were Sirs and Miss’s, there were prefects lording it over you. There was punishment of

loss of privileges. To me it was a prison. The day before going to Whittingehame has remained in my memory. I had amassed a certain amount of pocket money. I also had the notion of “what’s the use of money in a prison?” and went to one of those funfairs on Hampstead Heath. There I spent the entire afternoon and all of my money 2s6d a ride on riding bump’em cars to the point where the man manning that attraction actually came up to me and asked whether I had not spent enough. I remember shrugging him off and carrying on till nothing was left. [ The only other time when I remember behaving in such an irrational way was on the day in 1983 when I lost R&D/Lectriflex. I went to the Paddocks and bare handed spent the afternoon gathering the fallen leaves till I had no strength left and my back was very sore. Purely out of the feeling of “this is mine, I will not let them take it away from me”.]

I arrived at the school, forced to wear a tie and a school blazer with a shield on it. By then I could speak English and there were enough foreigners around me for it not to matter that I did not sound English. I rebelled from the start. Already on the first night there I sneaked out and visited the Duke of York cinema. I got to know Brenda, the usherette [ as they were called in those days] quite well and we had lots of conversations if the film was no good. I was caught the first time I sneaked out and Mr Tatmann, our sports teacher took in what I said – about being unhappy – and said in a comforting way that if ever I felt down I was welcome to come and speak to him. I never did and I do not remember ever being caught again. On one occasion – I had seen “Stalag 17” [ a film concerning the life of British prisoners of war in World War 2 Germany] at the Duke of York – I returned and had absolutely no idea what to use as an excuse as to why I had not been at the daily roll call. So, over the wall I jumped and into Sick Bay: “Matron, I do not feel well”. Matron did what all Matrons would do at this point, she shoved a thermometer in my mouth. No one could have been more surprised than I when she told me



that indeed I had a fever and was to go straight into the bed there. [thereby bye-passing the need to explain why I had not been at roll call earlier in the day]. Later that night, with sirens wailing, an ambulance took me to the local hospital and my appendix was removed.....

It was very strange to be at that school. Much of it was new to me – all history, literature and sports were totally different to my Haifa background. Suddenly there were proper sports facilities, games I had never heard of, Cadets [imagine me in the uniform of Her Majesty's forces parading up and down, taking a machine gun to pieces and being yapped at by a Sergeant Major. I hated every minute and had to participate!] I really missed biology and zoology. We had chemistry that was new to me. I refused French [after all, had German] which today I regret. Recently I participated in a School Reunion and was rather surprised to hear how much others loved that school. All this said, it was actually a good school, with a good academic level. We had great extra-curricular activities, put on quite remarkable theatrical productions, did a lot of sport including swimming and with a more mature attitude I can now say that it was indeed a good school.

The more senior classes had privileges which the younger students envied – such as the use of a common room (not that of the Prefects' one, of course!). From time to time we growing lads were hungry and, as the kitchens were closed for the night, would go on foraging raids. There was a large double-doored refrigerator there housing what we wanted. Soon, when our depletion of the contents had been noted, a chain appeared strung between the two door handles and equipped with a sturdy padlock. We were undeterred! The doors could open a crack still and a coat hanger was fashioned into a retrieving tool. When we discovered that the crack was not wide enough to allow the milk bottles to be taken out of the locked refrigerator, we toppled these, and emptied the contents into a jug. This soon became known as “milking the fridge.”

I only made history twice in that school – once when I - who had absolutely no interest in playing at being a soldier and particularly not one in the hated British army uniform! - won the best Cadet silver cup to Martin Bell's great chagrin as he really coveted that stupid prize. The second time was when Mr Halevy invited me to accept the great honour of becoming a prefect and I refused point blank.

Once a term there was a big visiting day on which family was allowed to visit. There was a period in which Ima was in the USA [ she had been invited by Senta (Nomi) Rubel – the former wife of Herbert Lubrani – to run a children's home in the USA and had hoped that it would enable her to get away from the UK Domestic Employment. As it was, the place was so filthy, the children neglected and money so scarce that Ima was frightened and escaped back to England.] Anyway, on such a visiting day Ima was not there for me and I met Elizabeth Zinn, who had actually come to visit another boy at the school. We became friends, a friendship which lasted for many years. I remember I took some posed photographs of her, pictures which she used to attempt to get into the acting profession. I was never comfortable with her and told her so, because I never knew when she stopped acting. On one occasion she was on Rep in Dundee. I was missing her and hitch-hiked all the way to Scotland, only to find out that that night there was no performance and I had no idea where she was. I therefore hitch-hiked all the way back to London again. Most of the way I was on the back of an open flat-back lorry. I crawled into my sleeping bag [ ex-air force, with separate arms and legs] under some tarpaulin and slept all the way. The driver – and his friend in the cabin were freezing that night and could not believe it that they had to wake me at the end of the route, warm and snug as I was and covered with several inches of snow!



<http://www.whittingehame.com/Bri13.htm>  
*Maths with Mr. John Marsh*



<http://www.whittingehame.com/Bri287.htm>  
*speech day June 1953*

We had a superb Welsh vice-headmaster , Fred Smith, who taught us History. When we did not feel like having

scheduled lessons we would “go fishing” – and get into conversation with him about all manner of other topics. Marilyn Monroe’s phone number was BROM 4689 – a mnemonic for the Duke of Marlborough’s battles in Blenheim, Remilies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet in 1704, 6, 8 and 9. “All people knew foolish Pomeranz must fail his Certificates” was likewise a support to remember all the causes of the French Revolution. I loved his classes, learned well and learned a little how to teach. It was he, too, who introduced me to the debating society at school, which I loved. I took great delight in standing up and debating some point only to get up again later on and debate the exact opposite!

I have always remonstrated, stating that I am unable to write, that I really need a ghost writer. In the back of my mind I also have to admit that I used to enjoy writing and must have been reasonably good at it as Yehuda told me when last we spoke. He still cannot forgive the fact that Mr Smith read out two essays, his and mine, although both had been written by me. ]

The difficulties arose in the school vacations – and where I was to go during them. After all my mother was not at home. My mother had taken on the position of Matron in the Ramsgate (Sephardi) Yeshiva where she was probably the happiest of all the jobs she had landed, even though she complained bitterly at being exploited and overworked and where I was able to join her in my vacations. She was responsible for the entire household of the College, including the cooking and the clothing for the staff as well as for the students who lived there.

That Yeshiva – named Montefiore College - was an amazing institution. Run by the Spanish & Portuguese congregations of England it was on premises which had been bequeathed to the movement by Sir Moses Montefiore. They plucked young Jewish men from their hovels of North Africa, flew them to England and gave them

an education and Rabbinic teaching. "Some of these young men had never seen a toilet" is a description that remains in my memory, but I do not know how accurate that is. Ima became a mother to them and was really comfortable there. Because I was unhappy at Whittingehame, the thought was mooted whether I might stay there and go to a local school instead. An interview was arranged with the headmaster. Now I must explain that while in the Ramsgate Yeshiva we males always had our heads covered. I wore mainly a French beret. I was not at all comfortable with this, but naturally respected the customs of the Orthodox Jewish establishment at which I was a guest. Now, when in the presence of that headmaster, the first thing he said to me was "take your hat off". I remember rebelling – no way would a stranger speak to me like this. Quick as a flash I retorted "I always have my head covered, we do not take our hats off to anyone" and that, as far as I recall was the end of my interview. I continued at Whittingehame.

One particular vacation I remember well. It was a festival time, the Chacham Dr. Gaon was visiting. At the end of the meal they started with the Bir'kat Mazon prayers after the meal. There is a shortened version which you can say when you are alone, but not when there are more than 10 men present. At the point where the shortened version had been said, Dr Gaon piped up in Yiddish "shoy'n genug, mir wollen tanzen" – "enough already, we want to dance". I think I was the only one who heard him.

I wanted to leave and return to the kitchen of the apartment occupied by my mother, because my motorcycle was there, dismantled into 1000 pieces. I had always great pleasure in servicing my machine and on this occasion was dealing with a re-bore of the main piston, fitting of larger piston rings and the re-grinding of the valve seats. There was no better place to do this than the kitchen. Outside had more rain and less light. My mother was not amused!

The Yeshiva was really an amazing place. There was so much beautiful singing. I remember so well David Kamchi

– later to become the leading Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation in Lauderdale Road, getting up early in the mornings, going to the synagogue all on his own and singing his heart out with “zmirot” = songs of praise. Every now and again such a melody comes back to me and I remember him there in the early mornings...

Ima was at the Montefiore College from Mar 1955 to Apr. 1956. In going through some old document I found a letter:

*17 Aug 1956 57 Beechwood Avenue  
London N3*

*To whom It may concern.*

*Mrs. Ruth Lewin my housekeeper for a short period during which she proved to be a very efficient, reliable and honest person.*

*If it would not have been for differences which arose about her sons visits I would not have thought of terminating the employment.*

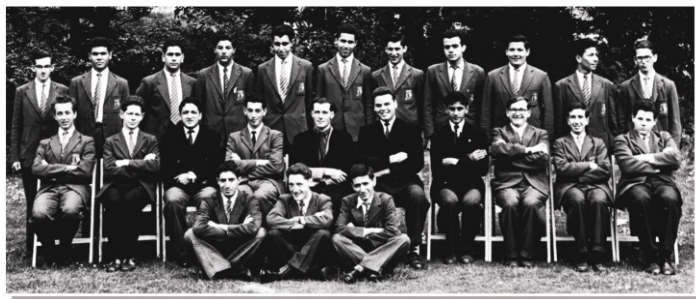
*I can recommend Mrs Lewin to everybody.*

Mr F V Frankl

I do not recall this at all, but clearly I was making difficulties for her! This was her very next position after the College.

On another occasion I stayed in our London house with Mathias Landau. He was a mathematics teacher who taught at Whittingehame and had become a great friend of my mother. I remember that he was educated by Kurt Hahn and went to Gordonstoun school with Prince Philip. He was a son of Edmund Landau a renowned mathematician and a grandson of Paul Ehrlich the forerunner of Chemotherapy. We seem to have both left the school at the same time and it was “convenient” that he looked after me. A most amazing character he was. He smoked incessantly, was exceedingly knowledgeable in endless topics and soon moved to live in Germany. Immediately there came an

endless stream of letters to my mother – not a day passed without at least one – often several letters from him. And these letters were accompanied by cuttings from newspapers, postcards and all manner of other enclosures which he wanted to share. A devout bachelor, very quick in speech, not always clear as to what he was rambling on about, he became the Mathematician leading the calculations for the construction of “his bridge” – the bridge in Turkey which spanned from Europe to Asia. It was from him that I first learned about the possibility of using magnetism to levitate trains on rails in order to reduce friction and thus gain more speed. He eventually adopted a young man whom he sponsored through college. We totally lost contact eventually and I do not know what befell him. Another person who lived in the house at that time was Yehuda Fattal, of whom a little more later... I had gained 8 O-level passes based mainly on the very broad education I had received in Israel. One of the subjects was German. Mr Minz was instructed to teach me in order to ensure that I would get through, because I had not attended any German classes at all. He gave me something to translate into German, which I did. He said that it was well translated but then, when he asked me why I had written a sentence in a particular way, all I could say was “no idea, I know it is correct”. Well, he attempted to explain the grammar involved and I went to Mr Halevy and begged him to be excused German lessons, they would only confuse me.



1955 <http://www.whittingehame.com/Bri148.htm> at end of 'O' Levels

I left school in July 1955 after O-levels, as fast as I could. With hindsight that was a big mistake. I should have stayed in that by then known and accepted learning environment for the 2 years for my A-levels. As it was, I never managed to get them and so never went to University. But I was too old for school by then and wanted to earn a living in order to take the burden off my mother's shoulders. The reality was that I had lost 2 years in the process – in England you took O-levels at age 16 and A-levels at 18. For my mother it was a struggle to fund my learning though she never said so. I wanted to earn my own living.



## 1953 – Another life begins

When we had arrived in England, my grandmother was living in a big house at no. 2 Akenside Road in Hampstead. Downstairs was sublet to a doctor who ran a GP's practice from there. There I was a fish out of water. I do not recall much about the initial period except that my grandmother did not take kindly to that young, 15-year old self willed, ill behaved boy. I guess she was too old by then to remember the antics of her own boys and really had not taken part [ other than by post ] in my development. We had many a disagreement. I was expected to honour her for her age and refused to do so other than if she earned it. I recall a really awful scene where my mother was standing in front of me asking me to bend a little to the wishes of my grandmother and me refusing. I actually voiced my wish to return to Israel and if need be to live with my father. Ima was despairing, at the end of her wits with the pain she was feeling, knowing that she was behoven to her mother and getting no help from her son. Eventually, in terrible anguish she moved half a step forward, stood with her feet on both mine and pounded and pounded my chest. It was almost as if she had a breakdown at that point. The only thing I can recall of that, other than the fact that I held her close to me until the fury and pain abated, is that we then each went to a different part of the house to cool down. This event was never ever mentioned again. I do not know whether she remembered it, she probably did. I certainly buried it deep inside me.

I had no idea how emotional this writing can get. When I had finished writing this paragraph and stood up to speak with Sylvia, I had goose pimples on my back and when I spoke to Sylvia, telling her what I had just written, actual tears welled in my eyes. It is amazing that 60 years after these events those emotions are still so strong and deep seated. Why it should be so I do not know. I was always "accused" of having buried the past and uncorking it has

actually been quite exhilarating. Some of it is clearly suppressed, but the majority, I contend, is forgotten because of no immediate concern.

One thing which surprises me again and again is quite how frequently I quote something or other which was first said by my mother. She died on 3 March 1989 and it is clear by these quotations of mine quite how often I must be thinking of her. The contrast between this and the absence of quotations attributed to my father are very striking. I know from stories told me by my mother that as a child I was a “Daddy’s boy”. I certainly remember the yearning for him when we were stuck for a night on the ship in Haifa harbour. But this close relationship evaporated after the divorce. My father from then on belonged to the other woman – his second wife, who did her utmost to alienate me. Things got so bad that I eventually became a “persona non grata” in their household and was never told when Aba died on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1994. I have not even been told where he was buried. In recent years I have tried on two occasions to make contact between Rachel’s children and mine, based on the argument that adults have a right to their wars, but that it was wrong that cousins did not even know of the existence of the others, but have been rebuffed. The most recent time was just weeks before writing this account, after I had learned that Rachel and Shlomo had divorced and that the oldest of their three children was working with his father. The retort to my advances on this occasion was “Mr Lewin, mind your own business”.

Does it hurt? – I guess the answer is both “yes” and “no”. In a way I have said goodbye to my father many years ago. The reality is that he became excluded from my thoughts and consciousness. We drifted very far apart and that was that. There seems no point to spill tears over this.

When we arrived in England, this land was famous for its thick fogs. For centuries its chimneys had been spewing soot into the skies, blackening the buildings, a process

which was much accelerated with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. 1952 was still a bad time. The fogs [they were actually called Smog, because of the high Sulphur content of that filth] were at times so bad that one could – literally – not see more than a few feet ahead. Car headlamps reflected in the fog, unable to penetrate and were useless. On such a day I decided that I was going to the cinema in London's West End, the Curzon cinema to be exact, where they were screening Thor Heyerdahl's "Kon-Tiki", relating the trip he undertook by raft across the Pacific from South America to prove his theory that people from South America could have settled Polynesia in pre-Columbian times.

Naturally, my grandmother objected – that was no weather to be out and about and equally naturally, I persisted and went.

I did – eventually - get to the cinema, but a very long time later. The bus literally crawled its way and on one particular stretch I actually walked ahead of the bus to show the driver where the kerb stones of the pavement were.

These fogs are now a thing of the past. In 1956 a "clean air" act was passed by which only "smokeless fuels" were to be used in future. Without doubt this contributed in large measure to cleaning up the environment.

The Helby family whom I had met in 1946 in Nottingham had, like my grandparents, moved to London. We met occasionally and in the summer of 1953 I was invited to their summer home on the west-most shores of Devon. It was a glorious summer, with lots of sun. Only two instances remain in my memory from that vacation. We were running on those cliffs overlooking the sea which was so beckoning. I dived into the water and nearly froze. You have no idea what a shock to the system that is to jump in from the warm rocks and be hit by the grip of the cold

which paralyses you. I got out as fast as I was able and never again swam in the seas around the UK shores. I was used to the Mediterranean and pined for it.

The other memory concerned my first [there was to be only one further occurrence in my whole life] encounter with fishing. Patrick had fishing rods and we sat on the rocks and sat and sat.... Later I wrote to my mother and complained what a waste of time this had been. In 8 hours of fishing all we had amassed were 8 fish which were so small they were not worth taking home. My mother's response was that I had got it all wrong. Fishing was not for catching fish, but for being outside in the fresh air. My only other encounter with fishing came many years later when my friend Chaim Gros and I were invited by a friend of his who had a small motorised boat in Brighton. I caught one mackerel that afternoon and remember eating it raw ala Japan. After all, it could not have been fresher and tasty it certainly was!

I met Chaim through Maurice Futerman, because Maurice wanted me to see the machine Chaim had designed and built in a tiny workshop. It was a fully automated machine inserting elastic bands into the waist and leg opening of plastic baby pants. The idea was to slip these over the nappies to keep the wet in. Sadly, it never came about. Pampers came on the market and the machine was obsolete before anyone ever saw it.

Chaim was a remarkable character. He and his brothers had gone by bicycle from Czechoslovakia to Palestine in the early 1930's. When it became obvious that war was brewing, he volunteered into the British Army and, before actually joining, he and his wife returned to see his parents in Czechoslovakia once more. There he was trapped in 1939. He was put into a German concentration camp which he survived mainly because of his knowledge of languages. After liberation by the Russians, they, in turn interned him and he escaped that to join the Jewish

underground. For several years he and his wife were piloting Holocaust survivors to the Italian coast for their illegal immigration into Palestine. In 1948 he was finally given permission to board one of these ships. As soon as he disembarked on the Israeli beach, he was given a gun and sent to the front – the War of Independence had started. He served in the Military Police and was soon promoted to be a high ranking officer in that force. When eventually he was discharged from the army he went to England where his brother was an engineer. This brother who had not gone to Palestine but to England, was one of the “backroom boffins” who had contributed much science and technology to the war effort. That brother insisted that Chaim was now to remain in England and finally be given a chance to study and make something of himself. Chaim chose engineering. In actual fact he was a remarkable combination of an inventor and a wheeler-dealer. He was forever working on ideas. For example when I got to know him, he had just been fitted with a heart pace-maker and learned that it would give problems if he walked near a source of electro-magnetism [ say under a hi-voltage cable, or a metal detector]. He was now busy making a jacket out of carbon-fibre cloth in order to screen the pace maker from harmful radiation. There were many, many more such ideas. He had for years been travelling on business to Hungary and each time he passed anywhere near the former Mauthausen concentration camp [ where he had been interred by the Nazis] he would broadcast the Kaddish prayer over his Citizen Band radio transmitter. The Russians asked him to find a market for a micro-light aeroplane. There were numerous pieces of medical equipment - he was always into something. He met Erica, a Swiss woman whom he married and they had a daughter, Aviva. Some time after the birth of Aviva, Chaim learned that his first wife, whom he had believed to have died in the Holocaust, as well as their son, had survived after all and there was Chaim bigamously married. I think the first wife agreed to a divorce and I know Chaim often met with his son. This was just another example of the tragedies that

arose as a result of World War 2. Chaim took me with him on a 2-week trip to Hungary. We were visiting all sorts of firms and individuals who wanted our help to penetrate “The West” with their products. While in Budapest we lived as lodgers in a private apartment [ much cheaper than a hotel ]. There was a Japanese lodger living there as well. We had most interesting conversations with him. He was training to join the Japanese Foreign Ministry and designated to work in Hungary. Hungarian is an impossible language, with nothing in common to any of the “normal” European languages. This young man said he had no problem with learning Hungarian because it had so much in common with Japanese – both in grammar and in vocabulary. He quoted all sorts of academic books which had been written on the subject, showing how people from Japan had migrated to that part of eastern Europe.

Another lovely memory are Chaim’s exotic fruit plants – citrus and bananas and the like which he was successfully growing in pots in their lounge. On one occasion he was stopped by a UK Customs Officer who said that he was not allowed to import such plants. A higher ranking officer was called and said “for all the danger this plant makes to the UK banana industry, you might as well allow him to bring it in”. To me he is immortalised in the oft used phrase of his “patience”! it will all be revealed”.

Nothing came of the cooperation between Chaim and myself. Eventually the Gros family emigrated to Israel, to live in Eilat. He reported with great amusement about the Israeli bureaucracy he had to fight as a new immigrant – which he now was after so many years away. Chaim died a few years ago.

## 1954 – 1957 acclimatising

In the summer of 1955 I enrolled in a summer camp organized by the National Union of Students in which we were living on a farm and helping, for a small wage, in the work there. I no longer remember where it was – but we were there to pull flax with which fabrics were manufactured. We were in various nationality-based tents and there was a great feeling of camaraderie. The Yugoslav tent arranged for a Slivovic plum brandy bottle to go round and I learned to put my tongue to the bottle orifice so that no one knew that I was not drinking. There were also a couple of Dutch girls in that camp, one of whom was Janny deBoor, the other Popkje Schuurer. Of Janny I really only remember the name, but Popkje was to become a lifelong friend with whom we are still in contact. She was a craft teacher, very talented. I learned from her that there was a place called Friesland, with more English in its language than Dutch. I kidded her that they were just Germans – because the Dutch anthem speaks of “Duitsen Blut”. The next summer I visited her home in Friesland and for the first and only time went sailing on a small boat which her parents owned. We still tell with a big smile of the way back when suddenly the winds died down and I had to use the oars to get us back home...

Through Bnai Brith contacts I was introduced to the Director of English Numbering Machines and quickly landed there as a “Student Apprentice” in Aug 1956. It was mind numbing! I was working on a drilling machine, the same hole in hundreds of identical components. Picking up from a box on my left and placing the drilled item in a box on my right. At one point I remember catching myself putting the drilled components into the box in a geometric shape simply in order to break the monotony. In the evenings I attended Southall Technical College for something called “First Year Mechanical Engineering” which I seem to have passed, but of which I have precious

little memory. In fact it was only when writing this and when I had pulled out the certificates from my past, that this came to light. The only part of the course which I do remember was learning technical drawing. I acquired an old drawing board and T-square from I no longer remember who and brought into use again my old geometry instruments case. I recall seeing for the first time representations of 3-dimensional objects, perspective drawing, evolving gears and gear trains – and many other useful basics for a future engineer. While I did find it interesting, I did not really enjoy it. It took many hours, one had to be ever so accurate. Rubbing out, while allowed, only left a mess. At that time I learned for the first time of the difference between the English and the Welsh. Across the street from the factory lived one of the workers in the same machine shop in which I was working. I think her name was Bronwyn [and I always forget or replaced names!], a very pretty girl. Her mother also worked in the company. I was often invited there for tea. We sometimes went to the cinema – we were always chaperoned. I loved the sing-song in their language and was an object of curiosity to them. It was here that I first heard the sound of Welsh choir singing. Needless to say nothing grew out of this relationship and I have not thought of it until I came to write these lines. At the same time I also attempted to pass the illusive A-level course in a single year during the two periods of five months in which this arrangement released me for private studies. Needless to say, I failed. Instead, the University of London granted me two passes at O-Level in Pure Maths and Physics 3 times no less - in summer and autumn 1957 and again in summer 1958, an exam which I had passed under the Cambridge University Exam system in 1954 and 1955. It was obvious that I would never get anywhere with part-time studies. I told ENM that I could not carry this on. I had been there 2 years and wanted a record of my employment for the future. I requested a written reference and to my horror the Personnel Officer wrote that while I had “worked well and gained experience at this and that I had failed to pass my



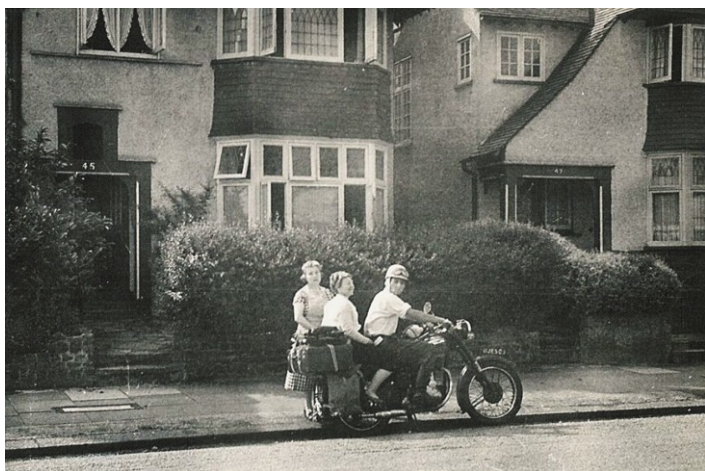
exams as required of a student apprentice and thus failed to qualify for the Sandwich Diploma which had been the aim."

That was decidedly not a good reference from my point of view and I requested an interview with Mr Penn. A second letter of reference was written "to whom it may concern" He wrote that I "showed a disciplined interest in the work and we regret his leaving us and wish him success for the future." I do not remember ever having to show the various references which I collected to anyone.

Many, many years later Sylvia and I were running a Government sponsored training facility called "Job Clubs". As part of this I always explained that in my opinion, references are not worth the paper they are written on and are only good for a prospective employer to show that he had covered his own backside and had checked. He could always argue that he had THOUGHT that the employee would be OK, but was eventually proven wrong – but at least he had that written reference to fall back on. In reality, only working together with someone and observing them perform will ever confirm whether they are useful – or otherwise.

In the summer of 1957 Ima and I went on an adventure. Riding on my 250cc old BSA motorcycle we travelled all the way to Austria. I had never had such a weight on the machine. Ima sat pillion, the only mode of sitting, she used to say, when her back did not ache. We had pillions down both sides of the rear wheel and a suitcase mounted horizontally on a metal carrier, all held somewhat precariously with "spiders" – those rubber ropes with hooks at each end grabbing whatever they could be hooked onto.

I remember the slight fear which grabbed my heart when we first set out from 45 Woodstock Avenue in Golders Green to the wave of old Mrs Goldstein, a tenant who with her husband and son lived in the upstairs rooms.



*Departure for Austria*

There was that wobble feeling in the handlebars, the weight at the back taking much of the pressure off the front tyre, which I had never experienced before. It was difficult to balance the immobile bike, but once I had engaged the forward gear and we had gathered a little speed I was fine. We rode down to Dover, across the channel to Calais and just out of the port, at a major road intersection was a traffic policeman directing the traffic. He looked at me and a broad mix of a grin and puzzlement crossed his face. It is amazing how much one can read from faces – and especially eyes! I looked around and saw my mother sitting behind me with both her arms stuck out at 90 degrees to her torso. We had arranged that she would signal directions throughout the journey so that I could have both my hands on the handlebars at all times. Now, of course, I understood. She had no idea which way we had to turn and so both arms had gone up. The traffic cop came up to us, we explained where we wanted to go – and he stopped all other traffic while letting us move on.

We ended up in a small village called Serfaus in the Tirol, the Austrian Alps. A farming village with one inn, one

impressive if small church and little else. It had not yet started to develop as a tourist centre at that time. As a matter of fact most of the structures were rather dilapidated, except for the Inn and the Church. We booked into the local Gasthof where there were about 2 dozen guests. The rooms were very comfortable with fluffy “Schweine” – nowadays we call them eiderdowns or duvets. Meals were in the dining room around large wooden tables, so that one was not confined to one’s own little domain or corner. It meant that there was a general conversation and each meal you had different people sharing the table and eating together.

We, of course, made quite an impression. We were known as “the English”. One old farmer, sitting and smoking a pipe outside his cowshed while contemplating the comings and goings in his village engaged us in conversation and we told him where and how we had come. He was so impressed that he said – in German of course – If Adolph had known about your adventure he would most certainly have given you a medal for Merit. Little did he know that if Adolph had still lived, we would have been in a concentration camp or in the oven.

There were only two young people there, sort of my own age and so it was that I teamed up with them. The girl left a day or so later and so I was stuck with only this young lad several years my junior, but at least not from kindergarten, nor of my parents’ generation.

He had told my mother earlier about himself, named the school he was at and among much else explained that he was not worried by rain because he was carrying a “Germanischer Regenschirm” - a “Germanic Umbrella” does not do justice to the translation of the phrase. My mother then warned me to be careful, he might well say things I objected to. She had recognized the name of the school which, apparently in the 1930’s was notorious for its pro-Nazi education.

We walked the hills and he talked and talked. It turned out that his father had been a priest in the German Army and had not returned "from the East". He was very impressed by the military successes of Israel who had routed the Egyptian Army in such a clever manoeuvre. He was totally in favour of the Jews as individuals who were receiving restitution for their losses, but he drew a line at the State receiving any compensation. That was not on!

At that point I had had enough. I told him that I might be English in the eyes of everyone because our number plate on the bike was from the UK, but that I had grown up in Israel and and... I explained my point of view on this and naturally came to speaking about the 1933 – 1945 period. I also explained that the Russian army were not alone at brutalising the population and raping the women.

That night we again had that communal meal and, as sometimes happens, there was a moment in time when only one person was actually speaking and that voice carried right across the silence in that room. It was my young friend speaking to his mother and saying "If my father knew all that which I heard today, how could he be a priest in that army?"

I suddenly felt very small. I bitterly regretted – I still do – that with my "enlightenment" and opening his eyes to the reality of that history, I had toppled his father from the pedestal on which the boy had known him.

There was a man sitting at that inn, with a German newspaper on his lap, a pencil in his hand and he was scratching his very bald and shiny head. There was this clue in the crossword puzzle that he simply did not know the answer to and usually he solved these in no time at all. I asked him what the clue was and gave him the solution. That was the start of a very long friendship of Hans-Joachim and Margot Boehm and us. They were visitors

from a little town called Engen, sort of halfway between the Black Forest and Lake Konstanz. They, like us, were vacationing here with their three children. We conversed for many hours. They were so interested in everything we had to tell. Margot, a devout Catholic, was always in trouble for refusing to join the Hitler Youth. She knew no Jews, but she felt it was not right how these were being described. It just could not be that one people are all bad.... Ima and I were invited to their home. We actually took them up on this and stopped over for one night on our way back to London. Little did I know how important that friendship would be in the future. Margot died a few years ago, Hans-Joachim many years earlier. Every now and again I still have contact with one of her three children.

In the summer London often had visitors from abroad. I frequented Eton Avenue in Hampstead where the Israeli Club was and there met Manu Rave. She was a beautiful girl, the daughter of a judge and much more interesting to me than I turned out to be to her. We decided to go and visit Wales and did so hitchhiking. Hitchhiking was a perfectly acceptable form of transport in those days and worked pretty well, especially if you let the girl signal the cars while you hid behind a bush. We got a lift to Brecon and went to the Youth Hostel. It was shut. We had not realized that on Wednesdays the Youth Hostels were not available to travellers. What to do?? I decided we would ask the police for help and we walked into the station. They were really very nice to us and very understanding of our plight and opened two police cells in which we could each sleep the night [with the doors open]. They even made us some tea! I think we hitched all the way back again the following day and I do not recall ever seeing Manu again.

Another attempt at "creating a girlfriend" was with Rachel Kruskal. She was from an orthodox family in Golders Green. I visited her home quite often. We occasionally went to the cinema, but no sparks flew. Years later I met Ima in the street in Golders Green and she reported that she had

just met Rachel and – guess what – she had married a Rabbi. At high speed the correction came from me: “You mean the son of a Rabbi?”. No, Ima explained, a Rabbi. Clearly I felt still very young and could not imagine that my friend had married a qualified Rabbi. I have never seen Rachel since, nor ever heard of what befell her.

My Norton 350 cc motorcycle was powerful enough to carry a side car and my next step was to acquire one of these. It gave me a more secure feeling. It meant that my passenger could remain dry, if a little squashed and for some time I used this machine. Then one day I was in an intersection and some woman ran her car into my sidecar. She had by mistake put her foot on the accelerator instead of on the brakes. Nothing happened, I was not hurt, there was only minimal damage to my machine – but I realised that my feeling of security was not based on any reality. I got rid of the motorcycle and acquired an old Hillman Minx car, which needed much attention – and I loved that. I was able to use my hands and my aptitude to do things myself and felt very good about sitting in the dry, no longer needing weatherproofing and arriving as a Michelin man at every destination.

I took driving lessons with an ex-Israeli driving instructor. We became quite friendly and even made a trip to the west country – Ima, he and I – in his car.

## 1958 – 1960 budding independence

The termination of my employment at the English Numbering Machines and my failure to pass the exams triggered something else. When I reached the age of 18 I was technically available for National Service. I had registered as required and arranged for a deferment on the grounds that I was continuing my studies. But now I was not studying and that ominous cloud caught up with me. I was required to attend a medical examination in Dec. 1958. The fact was that England was still recruiting young men, but the system was definitely coming to an end. Henceforth they would only have enlisted professional soldiers – and mercenaries such as the Ghurkhas. I had absolutely no intention to go into the British Army. The thought of holding a weapon and enforcing a curfew in Cyprus [ those were the EOKA days] was an absolute anathema to me. I actually had a bag packed, ready to depart at short notice and was thinking of going to Switzerland because it was a “neutral” country. How I expected to accomplish this I have absolutely no idea. I attended that medical inspection, was told to undress down to my shorts and shivered. – it was an act, but I did shiver. The medical examiner asked whether I was cold. “Yes,” I said, “I am used to warmer climates than this”. Next I was asked what illnesses I had had. I made a bit of a show of the fact that I had had amoebas in me. “You mean you had amoebic dysentery?” to which I responded, “I do not know, I just know that I had these creatures in me which move in a weird direction.” It was very evident to the examiner that I did not want to go into the forces and he asked me as much. My answer was very direct – I definitely did not want to have the honour of serving. I was classified as Health grade 4 – the lowest possible and in Jan 1959 received a letter to confirm that I was no longer seen as a candidate for National Service.

More complicated was my status in Israel. When we left Haifa I travelled on my mother’s passport. I did not have

one of my own. As I was under 18, I had also never been issued with an Israeli Identity Card which every adult citizen must carry. The result was that I had no Israeli documents in my own right. Nonetheless, at some time there was a communication from the Government of Israel concerning my status. I responded with the facts as they were. I was told that I was, ipso facto an Israeli citizen because in May 1948 neither my mother nor I declared that we did not want to become citizens. Renouncing one's nationality was also not an easy matter. It would have meant an application to the Israeli court and a personal appearance. I had neither the money for this, nor the inclination to travel there for this purpose and so I did something very rare for me – I just let it slide and never heard of it again....

This between and betwixt status was never comfortable. It was worse for others who had an Israel location as their birth place. They would immediately be noticed at the border and questioned – sometimes even detained – concerning their military duties. It was highly unlikely that this would happen to me because there was no hint of Israel on my British passport. I definitely did not want to serve in the military. My main reason was that I was estranged from the country and no longer felt that obligation that I did when I was still living there. Serving was not a matter of danger, but rather a nuisance because of the time it needed, which I did not have and the fact that it was not just a single stint in the military – it would have meant an additional month every year thereafter till the age of 50 and I was simply not prepared to consider this.

Was I wrong?

The fact was that I totally lost contact with my former house and class mates. I was a Yored. A sizable number of my class mates went together into a Kibbutz as part of their military service. It was not far from the border and they were at one and the same time working on the land as well as serving as guards. That act alone meant that while until



now I was a “Yored”, I was now also one who never served his nation. I also became one who never paid taxes and never voted. The sum total of all this was that I was a stranger and still am.

Two major steps in my life in those days: I enrolled in Acton Technical College to do my A-levels and acquired my first motorcycle. Home in Golders Green was shared with my friend Yehuda Fattal, an Iraqi whose parents had immigrated to Jerusalem and who was sent to England to acquire a good education. He was to progress academically way beyond me, first with a degree in chemistry and later, having married and moved to Sweden, to study dentistry under a scheme by which your employer had to keep your position open while you were studying. The motorcycle was a great success – the studies not so. I attempted to do the course in one year instead of two and was not prepared to settle down in order to actually study. The truth was that I continued to feel like a fish out of water, I had no idea what I wanted to be one day, was over conscious that I shared a class with people generally 2 years younger than myself, was itching to earn a living. At the same time I also knew that without a qualification I would be at a major disadvantage for the rest of my life. When I failed my A-levels the first time, I decided it was time to abandon full time education.

One memory of that time which rather epitomises my character – the need to find out for myself. It was winter, I was going on my motorcycle to college. It was cold and the snow lay out there. Ima said I was not to use the bike – and I was determined to have my way. I got about 500 meters from home, accepted the reality that 2 wheels on that slippery ground were not particularly safe and rather sheepishly returned home. Well, in mitigation I might argue that at least I was careful and when I realized how it was, did not take any further risks.

It was also at about that time that I began to teach Hebrew in Sunday schools attached to Synagogues. I had started in the German Liberal synagogue at Belsize Square, then at the Alyth Gardens Reform Synagogue and eventually at the United Synagogue just off West End Lane [ where we were married]. What I was really doing was to use my knowledge of Hebrew, my “natural” ability to impart knowledge and the need to earn some money. I was not a trained teacher and in retrospect, not a good one. I do not mean that the children did not learn, but that I had no clear thread of teaching and rarely actually prepared for a class in advance. The reality was that the level of Hebrew at the Sunday schools was so low, that whatever knowledge I imparted was new to the class. I, of course, based my teaching on the Israeli model. I had a first name, I was a friend of the students, we had a lot of fun and laughter associated with acquiring knowledge. I must admit to being very proud when very many years later we were in the Peak District, in the middle of nowhere at all, at the end of a road from where hiking paths led into the surrounding hilly countryside. A young woman approached me and said: “Do you remember me?” – I did not. “You used to throw chalk at me in the Hebrew class” she explained. That felt really weird. On the one hand I felt “old” – here was suddenly a memory of about 30 years earlier. On the other hand I had a confirmation that my student had really liked those lessons and had, indeed, learned something. And yet, it was not all “friendly”. On one occasion I was told that graffiti had been scrawled on the tiles in the wash-room which read “Lewin must go”.

A little after that I did “go”. I found out that at Alyth Gardens I was able to earn more and when Belsize Square did not agree to increase my salary, I applied to Alyth. Philip Cohen was the Rabbi there at the time. I explained to him that although I had no belief in God, all my teaching had been done at an Orthodox school, based on what I had picked up at school in Israel. I knew nothing of reform Judaism. “Do not worry” he said, teach them all you know,

they will then choose themselves what they keep and what they do not. I also taught a number of boys their Bar-Mitzvah portions in which I absolutely insisted that they had to understand what they were reading. Where I succeeded with that – those were the best pupils! At one point, when evidently the Boehms were visiting us in London I was teaching a boy his piece – he must have been coming to me for the lessons though generally I would go to them. Years later Herr Boehm said in conversation “no, no, Richard, iv’roo, iv’roo, the stress is on the last syllable.” Clearly this German man had understood. Did Richard?

Regular employment and marriage brought an end to my teaching career. There was neither the monetary need nor the time available any longer. In any case I was convinced that it was a waste of time. Most pupils learned to read mechanically, without understanding. They had no concept of the fact that the language had a common root for every word, that words had syllables and that you needed these fundamentals in order to be able to reproduce something that sounded reasonable.

In the summer of 1958 I made another trip by motorcycle into Europe – this time with my friend Benaiah Bardi. Our destination was the Italian Riviera and we ended up in the youth hostel of Rapallo. I loved the atmosphere, Kibbutz like, with everyone given chores to do before one could leave on any day. Communal – yet not so. There were, of course a lot of youngsters there including a couple of girls from England with whom we hung around for a while. They were touring in their Morris Minor 1000, a car model which I was to buy eventually as well. When they left and we had helped them to clean the interior of their dirty car, we were invited to their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party back in England. [I had to hire evening dress for that occasion and then lost touch completely. Today I only recollect that it happened, but have no idea of names or locations anymore]. While in Rapallo we would swim every day and a little offshore there were these large floating platforms on which you could rest

and sun yourself. There were usually several young people there, mostly Italian and most of them working in the villas which lined the shore. I had no Italian, of course, save only those words used in music to describe the mood and tempo with which that is to be played. I amazed myself at how, despite these limitations, I was able to exchange information and to communicate. Ben and I had befriended the mother of the youth hostel and one day she invited us to have spaghetti with her and her husband. When we arrived her husband was not there yet, but she started the meal anyway. We sat down to an enormous plate full and I picked up a fork and a spoon. No – she admonished, that is not how it is done and took the spoon away from me. She then proceeded to show me how skilfully she twirled the fork stuck in only one or two spaghetti ends and how the long, long string of wheat dough was wound on to the fork before being raised to the mouth. A little later her husband arrived and was given an equal heap. He picked up a fork and a spoon and as he was beginning to take his first mouthful I pointed at him and said “what about him??” With an utterly dismissive gesture of her right hand she said “Ach, him, he is not an Italian”. Presumably he was from another village.... I added this picture to my arguments concerning social rules – and do you, or do you not finish what’s on your plate? In Germany the answer is yes, in Poland it is no.

One morning Ben and I made a trip into the hinterland. In those days there was little protective clothing. Yes, I had a cork lined helmet complete with a kite mark to show it was authentic, but that would surely have been useless to protect the skull. Benaiah was driving on that occasion. On the way up the hill he got too close to the mountainside and while there was no damage at all to the machine, my right calf was pretty badly grazed. I did not take much notice of it. It was bleeding only a little, there was really no harm done. That evening it was painning more and when I woke on the following morning I was unable to put any weight at all on the leg. There was no doubt, I needed medical

attention. Eventually we found some clinic staffed by a catholic nun, who managed to break three needles in attempting to insert them into my skin before she finally managed to inject me. That was when I learned the expression – quel elephant!

Clearly Tetanus had set in and for a few days I was in real trouble. That episode passed and it was time to start the long trip home which would take us via Luxembourg to Brussels and then home. We had precious little money with us and were keen to gather some free food. On the road to the Youth Hostel in Luxembourg we came across fields of maize and arrived with panniers crammed full with my beloved tiras. We cooked this in the hostel, to be greeted by the other students there with “that is for the pigs!”. Try it, we said and shared what we had cooked. I was sorely disappointed when they liked it and polished it off. We thought it would not matter, we would gather some more the following day – but that was not to be. Despite being on the alert the whole way, we did not come across a single maize field between Luxembourg and Brussels.

Before leaving the hostel we were instructed to help sweep the floor. I moved towards the broom cupboard and can still hear Ben’s most helpful and sensible advice: “Take the biggest one you can find!” That has come to mind so often when I see a broom...

We did not get very far before trouble hit us. The motorcycle developed a fault, we needed a garage to carry out repairs and happened to be in a tiny village in the middle of nowhere. Luckily there was a mechanic there, he said he could deal with it, it would take a few hours.... So we stopped at the local inn and again I tried to make conversation... I told the few individuals then in that bar that we spoke very little Italian, but I did know an Italian song. Of course I had to sing it and started:

Avanti Popelo, Ala Ristosa  
Bandera Rosa, Triumphera!

It is only now, 60 years later, that I have checked for the first time and learned that this phonetic rendering from my youth should have been

Avanti Popelo, Aavanti Rosa,  
Banella rosa triumvera,  
ba nella rosa triumverra....  
a viva a viva a viva musollini  
ava libertato

So much for the accuracy of phonetic learning!

What is amazing to me is that without doubt we sang of VIVA SOZIALISMUS and not of Mussolini – I wonder who stole from whom here? It seems a bit similar to the singing of Marlene Dietrich who was equally revered by the allied soldiers as by their German opponents in World War 2. Anyway, they looked at me and one of them uttered in disgust “Fui!!, Communist!”. Little did I realize that my beloved song from the days in the Shomer Ha’zair, was indeed a communist song ....

In Brussels we again checked into a youth hostel and as it was already evening went out for a walk. That was the time when Brussels hosted the World Exhibition or Expo58. It was the first major World Fair after World War II. They had built a huge tower-like structure with 6 spheres around the central top of the tower called the “Atomium”. There were at that time very many locations where city staff were available to inform the tourists of the local attractions. We stopped at one and asked in great detail what we might find at the exhibition. In particular we were keen on any stands there which offered free samples of food and drink. We did still have the money to cross the water to get back home, but very little else. Having this clear in our mind we then asked about the town itself. What could we see that

evening? Well, there was the usual list of attractions and one being listed was “Manikin Piss” a world famous, life-sized, statue of a little boy peeing, placed there by his father who vowed that if the child were found he would erect a monument depicting exactly what the child was doing when he was found. On hearing that name I said to the girl behind the desk “what was that?” And she repeated it. “How do you spell it?” came next and so on for maybe a dozen repetitions for two foreigners who spoke neither French nor Flemish and knew nothing of Belgian culture. Eventually the girl realized that I was pulling her leg and gave one of the best examples I have ever seen of a flush. It was delicious!

And so we knew literally all the right locations for samples of fruit, soup, chocolate, etc. Only drink was a problem. We had to pay for this beverage they called tea. When we left that shoulder-high bar I asked Ben “Would you like some sugar?” and gave one cube to him and one to myself. When mine had fully dissolved in my mouth I asked Ben again and again and again – and yes, you have guessed it, again....

Eventually he turned round and asked: How much have you got – and I pointed to very, very full pockets which, because of the content, had made it quite difficult to walk without being scratched. Somehow the exorbitant cost of those soft drinks was mitigated.

Ben and I had long arguments about finding a spouse. He maintained that we must marry only a Jewish girl. I argued that a non-Jewish girl of a similar European background to mine was closer to me than, say a Yemenite or North African Jewish girl. All that was theory – he eventually married Verena, a non-Jewish Swiss woman who became a singer, while I married a Jewish girl [ with a somewhat similar background to my own].

Bnai Brith, the international Jewish welfare organisation, was part of our family for generations. I think my mother's Rabbi grandfather in Freiburg was the first to be involved, but certainly my grandparents were members, as was my mother. It was connections via that movement which brought her a posting in London with the Self-Aid for Refugees organisation and me a place with Tudor Accessories in Hayes, Middx. Which was owned by the Worms and Lowenthal families [they also owned the Colibri lighter factory]. Fred Worms to this day is a "big man" in the organisation and so was Laurie Lowenthal. I was to work for Tudor, but have time to study in the evenings. The distance was too great from Golders Green for every day travel and so I "went into digs" – rented a room in the home of a family in Hayes, not too distant from the factory. It was 1958.

I loved my time at Tudor – it was my first chance to earn my own living, it gave me the freedom from being behoven to my mother, it took me away from home to stand on my own feet – I was for the first time an adult. Work went well. At first I worked in the stores and was titled "Service Manager", later was transferred to the buying office. Even if I now say so myself, I was good at it. I failed my 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt at passing the A-levels, but I brought good results in the materials the company was buying. The company was making accessories for vehicles which were not – at that stage – standard items on new vehicles, let alone on older models. Perspex sun visors, screen washers with a manual pump fitted on the dashboard, car heaters installed to T-off the hot water from the radiator and pass through a coil inside the car, with a fan blowing air across that. Can you imagine a car without heating nowadays? At that stage it was a luxury to have heating, or be able to clean the windscreen. A boy named Derek was also working in the buying office and went away for 2 weeks to go on his honeymoon. When he returned, he stood on a Friday afternoon and watched the mainly female workers stream out of the factory [ we, in "the offices" started later in the



morning and finished later as well ]. One of the women in the office said "Now, now Derek, remember you are a married man now," to which he gave a response that I never forgot: " Just because a man is on a diet, it does not mean that he cannot look at the menu".

I had learned a great deal at Tudor. The commercial and organisational sides of purchasing may seem "simple", but they are not. Problems invariably arise in quantity and quality, in scheduling. A production line could cease if a small washer is missing, while on the other hand no one wants to have capital tied up in unused materials. I often cited my grandfather who maintained that life is nice, but expensive. You can have it a little cheaper, but then it is far from being as nice. I also learned to understand the life of a salesman. Many passed across my desk and hoped that I would purchase from them. I remember once going into the office of my manager and complaining to him that I had had that salesman of carbon paper whom I simply could not shake. I have never forgotten the sales director's comment: "You may have come across a really good salesman for the first time in your life!". At first my main task was progressing existing orders, but soon I moved on and was placing actual orders.

It was, by then, 9 years since I had left Israel. I had saved some money and I wanted to pay a visit. I had only difficult and tenuous contact with my father, largely lost contact with my one-time friends there, it was high time to visit. I told Fred that I was doing so and also the dates, in very good time. Little did I know what would befall me when much closer to that date in the height of summer I reminded him of my trip to be told that I could not go. It was holiday time, most others were away from their posts as well and he needed me at my desk. I could not change my flight booking and refused to budge. I applied for another post in the purchasing department of John Wilkins & Co which was confirmed on 22 Jul 1960 and I quit. I wrote Fred a letter on 12 Aug 1960 in which I resigned from

the Company [having found new employment. I explained that I would have a great opportunity of extending my knowledge of the manufacturing side of the business which I badly needed in pursuance of my evening classes and then I stung him": I wrote: "May I, as a mark of my appreciation of your help ask you to give the two weeks holiday pay due to me from Tudor, as promised by you this time last year, to any charitable organisation, in which you are interested. ] His anger came out in his response on 16 Aug 1960:

*David Lewin Esq,  
45 Woodstock Avenue,  
London. N.W.11.*

*Sixteenth August, 1960*

*Dear David,*

*I am in receipt of your letter of the 12<sup>th</sup> August. You must be aware by now that I am extremely disappointed at the manner in which you chose to sever your connections from Tudor and in which you have demonstrated that I personally misjudged your character.*

*The reason why I did not choose to pay you the extra money that you have asked for on leaving was simply because I wanted to demonstrate to you that a disregard of moral commitments for the sake of money need not necessarily be a paying proposition. The most important thing in life is to be able to look back over one's career without feeling ashamed of one's actions. To step into a better job, as you think you are doing, on the basis of breaking an agreement with us is wrong, inexcusable and you know it. No one wanted to stand in your way of meeting your father but your commitments to your new employers should have allowed for this.*

*With regard to your suggestion that we should give some money to charity, I must state categorically that I do not*

*need your advice what to do with my own or with the Company's money. You had neither a legal nor moral claim to the remuneration which you claimed after breaking your contract with us. In spite of all this, however, we are sending a donation of £25. to a charity since the Company does not wish to be associated with anything which rightly or wrongly may be misunderstood.*

*One last word of advice which I quote from Ecclesiastes, "Shem Tov Kishemen Tov". Yours truly,*

*F. Simon Worms  
Managing Director*

With this piece of Hebrew - for which I never forgave him – to this day: *Tov Shem mishemen Tov* [it is better to have a good name than to own [very valuable] good Oil] he sought to insult me when I was 100% certain that I was right – morally and in law. God only knows why he chose that proverb, it made no sense to me because apart from losing my flight money [ and I cannot recall being offered a reimbursement ] there was nothing financial or “valuable” in it] I was not prepared to accept that he had a right to make such demands on me – let alone insult me.

That trip to Israel, 21 Aug – 13 Sep 1960 was an amazing experience. I do not recall what the relationship with my father – let alone Hanna or Rali – was like. I do remember going on a trip with Hertl to the Galil and standing on the fire observation tower in Biryat Yacov with miles of forest in all directions. I also remember lying on the beach and finding myself looking at children of 15 or so, searching for someone I might recognise. It hit me with a real blow when I suddenly realized that my friends were no longer 15, but 23 and were unlikely to be on that beach at that time. The reality that struck me most was that the Haifa I knew had gone. The country was no longer a “Western” civilisation planted in the Middle East, but a Middle-eastern country with the predominant number of the population from

Eastern [ Arab] countries. The sounds were different, it was much more frenetic. There had been a considerable influx from Arab lands and the demography had clearly changed. I visited my old school, arriving at a convenient point, but totally unannounced. It was break time, the children were running about in the yard. A teacher stood near the gate, evidently on supervisory duty – it was my old Hebrew and Bible studies teacher. I looked at him, smiling, wondering and proffered my hand with just the word “shalom”. He took my hand, looked me in the eyes for what seemed to be ages and then said somewhat hesitantly “ I know you..... I cannot remember your name..... but your handwriting!!!!“

I did not stay long – he had to go in and teach, I knew no one else there, it was pointless really. I again got this depressing realisation that I did not belong there anymore. Not only in the school, but in the whole country. The fact could never change that I was a “Yored”, I had evaded military service while all the others served and some were maimed and others died. They were continuing their lives in our homeland while I had opted for the cushy life abroad. I was really alone there, with nowhere to go – and I did not feel like being a tourist when on my own. I have never enjoyed that since either. I dislike travelling anywhere on my own unless I have a specific task to perform there and then I return to base. I will not be a single tourist, irrespective of the attractions to be found in that location. I have never really thought of this so clearly. I am most comfortable at home. Here I have no problem being on my own. Away from home it is different – “alone” is equivalent to a punishment. Photographs in the album tell me the dates and that I travelled extensively, by railway from Haifa to Jerusalem [Yehuda was home for the summer], with Egged from Tel Aviv to Eilat, but the details of all of this are no longer in my memory.

So – I returned to London, where I also did not belong. I might have had a British birth certificate and a British

passport, but I was a foreigner none the less. I still own the flat in Haifa in which I grew up. Recently we mooted the possibility of selling it but the bottom line is that I do not want to. It represents a harbour where if it were ever needed, there would be shelter. Is this my personal feeling? The feeling of the eternal Jew? I truly do not know. I just know that I do not need the money [ not that Haifa Real Estate values are of any interest, they are considerably lower than elsewhere in Israel ] and have no reason to sell, even if we will never live there again. I guess "Harbour" is the most apt word. There was another, somewhat negative outcome. During this visit I found out that Haifa had physically expanded tremendously, there were very many new buildings and quarters, but the town had shrunk. I had left a big town and returned to find it dwarfed. Everything was so small – the shops, the streets, the distances. I could walk everywhere without any particular exertion. Somehow, the town had fallen off its pedestal.

## **1959 – 1963 Start of working life**

John Wilkins & Co in St Johns Street EC1 – very close to the Sadlers Wells theatre. They were a firm of electro-platers – the use of electro conductive solutions to deposit metals from an anode to the object which is to be plated. After that the objects were taken into a polishing and buffing shop and you ended up with mirror-finish copper or silver plated objects. On 22 Jul 1960 they wrote to confirm my appointment in their Purchasing Department at a salary of £728 per annum. I was working as a buyer for them, while continuing an evening class in the Ordinary National Diploma of Mechanical Engineering, a Diploma of relatively low level but a Diploma none the less. When in Sep. 1961 I passed that Diploma it became clear to me that I would get nowhere in life without a better qualification and so enrolled in Hendon College for the Ordinary National Certificate and thereafter the HND – the Higher National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering which led to the coveted Associate Membership of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. I had to give up my job at Wilkins – I remember how sorry Mr Penn was at losing me and being wished well by him who accepted that I needed to improve my status or else remain a nobody working for his firm.

The ONC was mine by Sep. 1961. In the academic year 1961 – 1962 I started the HND course. It is interesting to me to see – and I had totally forgotten it – that I consistently got high marks [ 80's and 90's ] for Private Study and Lab work, while in examinations I dropped to the 50's and 60's.

The HND course was in theory a “sandwich” of 6-month college and 6-months industry based combination, with the College responsible for finding the work placements for the students. Little did I realise what shambles that College administration was and at the end of the first academic 6 months I had nowhere in UK industry to go to. The only

good thing that came out of the college years [other than the Diploma itself] was that I managed to get rid of my ailing Hillman Minx car. The car had given up the ghost. The college had a vehicle maintenance class. Hofstadter and I pushed it from Neeld Crescent in Hendon to the college and left it there. I did not have the money to pay for a pick-up van to collect and dispose of it.

Help came through the Boehm family in Engen whom we had befriended on the Austria trip. Herr Boehm was a well known insurance agent and he procured for me an apprenticeship with the Aluminium Walzwerke in Singen / Hohentwiel. I first arrived there in June, 1962. This was, in true German style a proper 3-year apprenticeship. I was moved from department to department in that factory - from the smelting of the raw material to the pressing and rolling mills and eventually into the data-capture, the use of punched cards which were automatically sorted and encoded by machines – a pre-runner of computers. That was amazingly “simple”. Cards were stacked and wire needles passed into the holes. When they hit a resistance (i.e. the next card did not have a hole there) one could pull out all those cards which had that identical property – a hole in that location. The work varied from mind numbing to really interesting. In the ingot pouring I had always been warned how dangerous it was to allow any water in contact with the molten aluminium. Then one day I saw it happen. Somehow, by accident, some water was spilled into that molten metal and there was an almighty explosion which not only burnt the employees immediately next to the scene, but also blew the roof above away. That example really drove home the need for care at the workplace. In that first stint I served also in the rolling department for Al. sheet and later in the rolling of long coils. It was interesting to see how the material was reduced in thickness step by step and was either utilized at the intermediate steps or else rolled thinner. I never allowed my family to call the material “silver foil”. I had too much respect for aluminium foil, really understood the complexity of getting it to that

stage, applying different textures to the surfaces and even laminating it with plastics. I was back at the “Alu” in April 1963, now elevated to quality testing laboratories and the works management offices. I had to calculate work times and bonuses based on the work produced. In an earlier period I was on the shop floor with a stopwatch, analysing and recording time and motion of the operatives and occasionally suggesting how they might improve their productivity. My third period there was from May to September 1964. That is when I was taken into the Data Processing Department. This was precisely what I had expected at ENM – but I never got it there. All I remember is drilling those blocks endlessly.... The very worst time at the Alu was the night shift in the rolling mills where fatter sheets were reduced to become thinner sheets by passing them through a set of rollers – 2 men on each side of the machine, the ones at the rear handing the sheet back to those at the front again and again until it had reached its required thickness. You need to imagine the clattering noises as these sheets of aluminium clattered on the roller-tables, clatter, clatter, clatter all night through. It was not easy for someone to remain awake through the nights for someone who had never done shift work in his life. But life was really good! I was earning well, I did not need to pay tax because I was working for only 6 months. I was entitled to and did, opt out of the “Kirchensteuer” – the tax levied by the state with which the state then supported the churches. There were not too many synagogues around to which my contributions could go. I had my own vehicle and was well looked after by the Boehm family. They owned a long, single storey double bungalow which overlooked a beautiful green valley with farm land and wild sections. Compared with England everything was beautifully kept, well engineered, functional and reliable. They had a great garden on that slope, partly ornamental, partly vegetable and fruit, I really felt at home with them. Mrs B. was a devout Catholic with the thickest south German accent. Mr. B. was a jovial character who pointed out with a great twinkle in his eyes the small areas of darker, more lush



lawn close to the house - the results of his “beer throughput”, as he explained it. They really made me welcome. On one occasion they also welcomed my father. He had arrived from Israel, took possession of a Volkswagen Combi in which he and I made a short trip together. He was visiting Neustadt an der Weinstrasse where there were some restitution offices. I learned that he had set himself up as a quasi lawyer who made Social Security claims on behalf of others and helped these through the bureaucratic maze that was the restitution laws. Evidently he was quite successful at this. I do not remember any longer how long we were together on this trip. Sadly, my only memory is of resentment. I resented the frugality my father displayed. I resented having to sleep in that van [ equipped as a camper, mind you! ] I resented having to wait outside while he went into those Social Security offices, I resented not being allowed to drive, I resented being pontificated at – I just resented.... I remember saying to Margot Boehm who made some clucking noises of how sad it was that he had departed, that in my opinion she was a saint having taken him in. I do not think that she understood me. My father could be and was, most charming towards others. It was just I who resented...

A word here about German restitution. There was this macabre joke going around the German Jewish population. The word for restitution is “Wiedergutmachung”, literally “to make good again” and the joke was that “I was not in a concentration camp, therefore cannot make a claim for restitution and that cannot be made good any more”. Without doubt the initiative of above all Konrad Adenauer the West German chancellor (1949-63), made an enormous contribution to the wellbeing of German Jewry’s refugees. While the availability of the restitution money clearly benefitted the survivors in practical, monetary ways, it also had another remarkable side reaction. The Yekkes, unlike the East Europeans and those from Arab lands who arrived in Palestine/Israel, found it almost impossible to learn

Hebrew. I think this was based on two reasons: the one was that they were unwilling to make mistakes and be seen as foolish. They also did not have the presence of mind needed when you learn a totally different language that has no commonality whatever with your mother tongue. The other reason was that on the whole they were not brought up with the Hebrew prayer book, while those who did clearly had a huge advantage in converting the holy script into a modern language. Anyway, the availability of extra funds meant that for the first time in 30 years there was a little less pressure to have to earn one's livelihood and as a direct consequence the Yekkes too finally began to speak Ivrit. They would never lose their distinctive pronunciation, but they were finally able to communicate in the language of the land to which they had been propelled by the Nazis. Ima received hers in 1957/8. It was a Godsend, despite being a modest amount [ she had been a student and escaped the persecution and so had no loss of property or earnings....] Nevertheless, it was vital in keeping us afloat.

A word here on being in Germany.

Appointed by no one at all, I found myself for longer periods in Germany by cause of circumstances and in a way I had become a representative sample of the Jewish people. It felt very strange. I have already mentioned what a stigma it was to be a "Yored" but to be one who went to Germany was the absolute rock bottom. I had always lived with the knowledge that people are innocent until proven guilty. In Germany this was to some extent reversed. People of my own generation were, without a doubt, innocent of the crimes their parents had committed and were thus, ipso facto innocent until proven guilty. With the generation of my parents it was, however, totally different. They were all tarred with one brush which proclaimed in large letters: Guilty, until proven innocent. This feeling of mine of having to "educate" the people around me, many of them had never seen a live Jew, actually forced me to be much more careful in what I said and to whom I said it. I

was, however, able quite often to “educate” them, to explain history from my point of view. I must say that in all the 18 months or so that I spent in Germany as an aluminium worker, I never once came across any anti-Semitic comment. Only once – and that was totally innocent – one man in the canteen, tired of the noise and hubbub of conversation around him, declared “you are going on like in a “Judenschul” [and can you fault this colloquial proverb? Have you not ever heard the din in a synagogue? ] But I turned to him and asked whether he had ever listened to the Eckehardt school next door, was that not noisy too? He, poor man, was totally bewildered, he had certainly not noticed that the word “Jew” was part of that sentence. I learned at the time that there was a family by the name of Cohen in Singen who had lived there throughout the war years, but were not Jewish. I still regret that I never made contact with them. As a matter of fact I interrupted writing this narrative and sought out the name Cohen in Singen. Amazingly they are in the phone book and I “met” a totally lucid widow of Hans-Michael Cohen. She was born in 1921 and maintained that her memory is not good, but it may be that I will get contact to her four children. Who knows, maybe another story will grow out of this little initiative... The fact is that this Mr Cohen’s father had converted to Judaism and had moved south to Singen where “things were not as harsh in the War” as his son Michael, whom I telephoned in Schaffhausen, explained. “Very many small incidences took place which saved his life, not least that he was working in an important position in this aluminium factory which was vital for the war effort.”

It took another 35 years before the next meaningful shift in my attitude came about.

It was 1995 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War 2 Armistice in Germany. I was driving through Germany on that day on my way from London to Budapest. All day long the radio stations were broadcasting live calls from their listeners who related their experiences of that day 50 years

earlier. That was the first time I actually heard the ordinary person, citizens of different towns and villages, call in and confess that yes, they did know what was happening during the war, they did see the columns of Jews, they did commit those atrocities, it was not only the Russian army which was treating the civilian population brutally.... On that day I was so overcome by the emotion stirred up by those continuous phone-ins, that I simply had to stop driving for a while. I had to calm down before continuing the journey. I happened at that time to be on the Autobahn in line with the ancient city of Worms. I came off, drove to the Rashi synagogue, the only place in Germany to which I still had some affinity in a country where I know my family to have been living for at least 400 years.... By now, the vast majority of Germans were not alive during those days of Nazi power and if they were, they were too young to have personally been involved. They now earned the right to be innocent until proven guilty, albeit that we are seeing yet another revival of Right wing extremism there – as well as in numerous other countries including England.

## 1961 – Social life

It took me about 10 years before I first came across a group of young people where I felt comfortable. That was the group of children of ex-Germany Bnai Brith members. My mother was a member, so had been my grandparents and my great grandparents before them. I joined and became part of that group which existed not only to entertain itself, but it also remembered that there were others less fortunate in society, who needed our help. Thus I became one of the founder members of the Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge and later, as we outgrew this stage, the First Unity Lodge. It was in this group that I was to get to know my future wife Sylvia Goldschmidt. (Her parents had escaped Nazi Germany to South Africa). It was thus also a natural progression when one day I turned to her and said "One day you will be President of Bnai Brith UK) – which she then proceeded to do. So it was this Bnai Brith group that actually allowed me to feel that I could belong in this strange country.

And yet, not even my Bnai Brith Lodge has been a complete answer for me. In large measure it remained a group of acquaintances, not really friends. I remember many years ago we were debating whether maybe, instead of Sundays, we should meet on Saturdays. Harold piped up "But on Saturday I meet my friends". I remained silent, but I knew what he meant. It really is the English society, I think. It lives in a cold, grey climate. It does not rain so much, but the sun does not shine and there is never any certainty that tomorrow's weather will be like it is today. So are its people. "My home is my castle" may be a benefit, but it is also a curse. Possibly the "fault" is with me. I did not grow up here, did not go to school here, I remained a stranger. The reliance on my peers which I remember from my youth is not available here. I cannot say that Bnai Brith did not do wonderful things, but somehow it is at arms' length, without a hug. And yet. It is a remarkable group

which bucks all the trends. After 45 years there must be at least 50% who have been there since its start, a most unusual fact in our ever shifting population. As I grow older the feeling hardens more and more that there are an enormous number of acquaintances out there and very few friends. I hate gossip, I dislike small talk, I cannot abide this hopping from person to person at parties. I am uncomfortable with more than 6 people at a dinner table, because if there are more, you cannot speak to anyone. As my hearing deteriorates and noise has become a problem, I pull myself out of crowds even more than before. I fail to see what pleasure anyone can get from holding a plate with something on it in one hand, a cup of tea in the other while making small talk. Often, mid sentence someone butts in and the small talk turns to something else. That is supposed to be called "social intercourse", I get no pleasure from it. The din of the general hubbub in the room makes my tinnitus so much worse that my head threatens to explode. On the other hand, if you ask me whether I have a workable alternative, the answer clearly is "no". I have for a long time refrained from making comments about serious issues unless I feel that I have something worthwhile to add or to improve. That is particularly the case when it comes to politics. If I had my way, instead of politicians ruling the world, while using educationalists and social workers as advisors, it would be the social workers who rule the world, with – maybe - politicians as advisors. But I know that this cannot work, it is impractical, because social workers do not have the ambition to rule over others. So I keep my mouth shut. We are observing the demise of Bnai Brith – as all other social groups. Somehow we managed to find the time for this despite building careers and rearing children, but our children do not follow in these footsteps. They are too busy with themselves and their work. I see a younger society which has become inward looking if not selfish. It is sad.

And yet – when in history did children follow their parents' footsteps blindly? I had always resolved never to say

“when I was young.....” by way of a reproach and these words are not intended as one! The fact is that our children are making their own way, to some extent based on what we parents taught them, or where we may even have set an example for them. They are largely in the caring professions, each of which gives so much to the receivers of this care. Undoubtedly whether it is Danielle with her special needs children, Daniel caring for cancer patients, Karen with her music therapy clients, Dean going to his Thursday football match even with broken ribs in order not to let the side down, Nina and Michael who were prepared to accept a year of discomfort as well as the danger of endless tropical “nasties” – each one of them puts so much of themselves into their chosen path for the benefit of others. I am very conscious that our children chose to go to “Unity” which integrated able and not so able children, entirely of their own volition. We had really nothing to do with that choice. Society does not lavish riches on those it employs to give care and what they are doing is, without a doubt, commendable. We learned a long time and fully accepted, that one day the fledglings will leave the nest – and that it is an absolute “right” for them to do so. They have in the most, accepted that we do not interfere [ the degree probably varying in the order of their ages ]. When we do offer an opinion, unsolicited, is that still an “interference”? (I guess the answer will be “yes”. And yet, is it wrong to do so based on our life experience? We are certainly not cleverer – we have just lived longer – and that echo of long ago, when on a snowy day I took my motorcycle out despite Ima’s warnings – still echoes in my ears. I brought it back, she was right....

I must admit that I am also not at all certain that I would find an answer to my wants in Israel. After all, it is a totally different country to the one in which I grew up. It is true that I was blessed. While being and remaining a foreigner, I found a partner who largely thought like me, we have brought up a brood who made us proud and who in turn are building their own havens and harbours. We remain

together as a unit despite the separateness of the individual families. No other couple of our age can boast to have its children still with them in synagogue at the High Holidays as we do. We must have done something right!

We had few rules about upbringing. One fundamental one was never to use physical force. When you hit a child, you have automatically lost the argument. I cannot remember ever hitting one of my children [ they will probably correct me on this ] and always tried to give them a reason for any demands made on them. I always left psychology to Sylvia. She had far, far more such insight than I do. I must admit there were many occasions when I wished that an instruction was accepted just because I said so! I also believed in giving a full and appropriate response to a question and never to beat about the bush. It is the need to know which governs the ability to learn. The one area I do not remember ever teaching my children concerned sex. It was not that I was uncomfortable or squeamish, or shy. On the contrary. The fact is that as far as I can recall, I was never asked.

For the Christmas holiday 1961-62 I joined a National Union of Students organised ski holiday in the little village of Aurach near Kitzbuhl, Tirol. I had never been skiing before [ and never since] and I had no idea who else would be in the group that was going there.

We travelled by coach from London to Folkestone, by ferry to Calais, train to Basel, St Anton and Kitzbuhl. There we stayed in the Gasthof Auwirt.

I found skiing rather hard work. We of course, started with an instructor on a nursery slope – but as that winter there was precious little precipitation, that nursery slope was quite high in the mountains. To this day I can hear our instructor shouting at us to put some spring into our legs and not to remain rigid and “steife Haxen” became a phrase which I have often used myself in later years. I had



done a fair bit of roller skating in Haifa, in London occasionally went ice skating in an ice rink where you could hire the boots and still I found that I did not really have the muscular strength for the plough movement or the agility to remain upright when it felt as though someone had pulled the land from under my skis. I also found the need to keep walking up again after a very short span of time sliding downwards, a bore. I know now that if I had ever returned to skiing, then I would have preferred to do some cross-country run in that beautiful mountain scenery, rather than hurtle at speed down a slippery slope. We were quite a large group in that Gasthof, but certainly not the only ones. There were other guests there and some children.

For the actual Christmas Eve festivities we arranged for each person to buy/make a small gift designed for a particular person, but the source remained unknown by the potential recipient. Someone had the forethought to add presents also for the children in the house, so they were not left out, as we were, of course, all in the same dining room, across quite large tables.

Someone had to be Father Christmas and who better to choose than the only Jew among them? - it befell upon me to do so.

At that time I was sprouting a moustache which had become a terrible nuisance in daytime because the hair ends tended to prick my lip and worse, the icicles that formed in the hair when we were outdoors. I have never liked the cold – and that was an extra burden.

I needed to disguise myself. The only suitable piece of clothing I had was a red woollen cap with a pompom atop which was knitted lovingly for me in the first year of my life, by one of my two mothers, I know not which. So I borrowed from others. One of the girls had a similar knitted hat that was all white. I created a white cotton wool “beard” which continued up my temples and merged into the white hat rim

which had been tucked inside my hat one. A pair of dark glasses and some very baggy trousers, much too big for me came from the farmer who owned the guest house. He also provided high rubber boots [ used in the adjacent cowshed ], a large authentic hessian sack and – to top it all, a sledge which was parked in his shed. I really felt proud and loved the acting role into which I had been thrust. The adults of course knew who it was, but the children genuinely did not recognise me.

When the gifts had been handed out, I thought it was over and began to disrobe. Someone hissed in my ear “not here, the children think you are real” so I bade farewell to the children and we waved to each other with a promise that I might come back again next year and I retired to my room to change to my normal clothing. Before going down again I decided I had had enough of those icicles and shaved my moustache.

The result was astounding! Now the others, the adults, literally did not recognize me and it took a few moments before the penny dropped. Father Christmas had left the room and a total stranger then re-entered it.

We composed a camp song at the time transposing the words of “now this is number one and the fun has just begun”... I had forgotten about this, but a letter from a now unknown and forgotten Helmut, all in verse, is lodged in my photo album and reminded me of that great fun vacation.

*Wien, 5.1. 1962*

*Dear David ,*

*I really enjoyed having you In Aurach. I suppose you impressed me more than anyone did so far. Instead of making long songs of memory of the singularly (?) beautiful times we spent there I shall copy the “Ode to Aurach” to you:*

***Ode to Aurach.***

1

*In nineteen hundred and sixty one  
In the cold month of December,  
Two groups of students left their homes  
Each one a U.S. member.*

2

*From East and West and North and South  
To Austria they came,  
To ski in glorious Kitzbuehel  
Of world renown and fame.*

3

*One group cane from the frozen North  
The land of mist and whisky,  
Where blust'ring winds make wearing kilts  
a little bit too risky.*

4

*However in this crazy group  
'Oor Ernie' was the only Scot,  
because the others were the Yanks  
and other such baloney.*

5

*One cold and snowless winter's day  
—The snow it never came  
The Yankees from 'Auld Reekie'  
Descended from the train.*

6

*The other group came from the South*

*from Liverpool and Leeds  
A motley crew, a Hullabaloo  
All Sassenachs in Tweeds.*

7

*We all arrived in Austria  
Full of energy  
determined that of bones we'd break  
A maximum of three.*

8

*The majority had just begun,  
Had never skied on snow  
A rather risky process  
As they were soon to know.*

9

*Our camp song now will follow,  
To show just how we fared,  
To slide down on our beam ends  
Was fine, for all we cared.*

1.

*Now this is number one  
And our fun has just begun  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..*

2.

*Now this is number two  
And I'm leaning on my shoe...  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..*

3.

*Now this is number three  
And I've gone and lost my ski...*

|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..

4.

*Now this is number four*  
*And I'm feeling rather sore...*  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..

5.

*Now this is number five*  
*And I'm heading for a dive...*  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..

6.

*Now this is number six*  
*And I've gone and crossed my sticks.*  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..

7

*Now this is number seven*  
*And my skis point up to heaven*  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..

8

*Now this is number eight*  
*I'm coming - watch out, mate!*  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..

9.

*Now this is number nine  
You've knocked me down, you swine!..  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..*

10

*. Now this is number ten  
And now we start again. . .  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again,  
|Roll me slow, in the snow,  
|I fall down, get up and do it |again..*

*Well, David, here you are . They were really marvelous  
girls, weren't they.  
All the best for new year  
yours*

*Helmut*

It was in Germany that I made my first closer liaison with a woman. I had had girl friends before, coveted some more than others, never parted with a heavy heart for any length of time. Mr Boehm's mother, who had been living in the annexe, died and they let the room to a lodger, Anneliese. She was a spinster, a teacher of handcraft, a superb cook and Catholic. We spent a long time together, going on trips in her VW beetle. We talked and talked about the guilt she was feeling for what Germany had done to the Jews. Eventually I moved in with her, much to the dislike of Mrs Boehm whose Catholic background could not accept such a liaison and yet, Margot and I remained good friends for many years thereafter. Anneliese and I made many trips together, into the Nature Reserve of southern Germany

where I first saw the wild orchids including the bee and the Ladies-slipper orchid; into Switzerland, always into the beautiful natural areas in that part of the world. It was then that I learned the little I know about foraging for edible mushrooms and we often came home with a basketful of Steinpiltze, Pfifferlinge, Totentrompeten and others. What I had forgotten and only a closer look at the pictures has revealed, is that on one occasion Ima joined us on a trip in the mountains.

Another trip comes to mind in that blue VW Beetle to Anneliese's mother and sister's family, including her nephew Norbert whom she loved dearly and treated as her own son. They lived about 3 hours drive away. The roads in that part of the world wind through thick forest and the warning signs at the sides of the road keep telling one of a "kurvenreiche Strecke". I renamed it "eine Weibliche Strecke" or a feminine stretch of road, both because it was an opportunity for me to play with language, which I love and because I knew she would be embarrassed because I was being too explicit. But the reason this trip remained particularly in my memory was two-fold. While on our visit I was certainly made welcome, but there was a clear prickliness. They did not like me and I was never certain whether it was because I was a Jew or because they could not understand what on earth she was doing with that young foreigner. It was probably a combination of the two. On the way back there was a thunderstorm like I had never seen before – or since. The water just fell from heaven while the valleys were filled with momentary daylight of the lightnings. It was so bad that the wipers on the car simply could not cope, I could not see through the waterfall on the windscreen and we were forced to stop at the road side and to wait for the worst of that cloudburst to pass.

A little amusing memory – Singen was very close to the Swiss border and was the first town you reached when you returned to Germany. A broad, fast road led to this border and formalities were relatively few. I was used to customs

inspection in England when they were particularly interested in things such as radios and cameras brought in from abroad. Not so on the German border. Here they were after sugar and soap, because apparently these commodities were manufactured in State –owned factories and the state did not want illegally imported competition. On the other hand we often filled up the cars in Switzerland because petrol was so much cheaper there. Another amusing incident concerning this border comes to mind: I was driving the German VW from Switzerland along the high road from Schaffhausen and noticed that oncoming cars were flashing me with their headlights. I had no lights on, did not understand what they were trying to tell me, until at the bottom I came to a sharp, 90-degree turn. There a policeman stood, who signalled to me to stop.

He proceeded to tell me a long, long rattled –down speech according to which, under paragraph such-and-such of the xyz regulations I had exceeded the speed limit and he was entitled to fine me DM50. I could refuse and be summoned ..... and so it went on.

When he had finished, I looked at him all innocent and lied in my best English “I am sorry, I do not understand what you have said”. Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather – he repeated the whole thing again in English!!! I paid up and shut-up!!

I also derived a great deal of pleasure fashioning furniture for her apartment out of bamboo and raffia. It was clear to both of us that there was no long term future for our relationship, but it was good and sincere while it lasted. It was here too that I often heard classical music played, probably the first time away from my mother’s home and got to know and love the clarinet and cello pieces, the stirring of Czech Nationalism and much else.

While there is no doubt that this was an interesting and satisfying period of my life, it also had its real drawbacks.



The worst was that I felt estranged from England. Being away for 6 months at a time meant that one could not strike roots at home. Each time I returned I had to start from the beginning, so to speak.

I had a fairly easy choice to make. Some time earlier I had taken the aptitude and psychometric tests to see what I was suitable for. Since childhood I knew what I did not want, but I did not know what I really wanted. That test was totally unhelpful – it told me that I could do anything I wanted if I set my mind to it. What Pearson Panke Ltd. gave me in the first instance was a bridge between engineering and commerce. I had come to realise that with what I had attained and with what I had in me naturally, I would never become a brilliant engineer. For one, my academic attainment was not high enough. Then came the fact that although mathematics had been my “love” I had great difficulty in working on the applied mathematics. Today I wonder whether my inability to visualise – to get pictures into my brain – was part of the reason why this was so. In years to come I often said that if I had my choice, I would get into what we used to call “medical engineering” – the application of practical solutions to help those in society who were disabled or somehow incapacitated. My mother was unhappy with my decisions. First that I did not remain in full time education, then that I did not stick it out and get that Membership Status and now that I was slipping into commerce. She had come from an academic background and my path of lower level was too much like that of my father. Not up to the required standard.

## 1964 – 1965 My Syl

Something else, fundamental to my life and momentous in every way happened. As I begin to write about this I am very conscious how, for some days now, I have been circumnavigating it, almost reluctant to start. My reason was confirmed this afternoon and so I am making note of it at this stage.

All I have written so far has been my own history, as far as I can remember it and as accurately as I can portray it. Now I am reaching a time when another was witness to what transpired and is very likely – no, with absolute certainty – going to add to and correct what I recall. It feels a bit like exams time and I am about to drop 30% of the average I get when not in the examination room.

At the end of September 1964 I returned to London from Germany and as usual, resumed my regular visits to our Bnai Brith group. On one particular occasion one of our own members gave a talk about her work as a Speech Therapist, working with children. [Thank you Syl – this was your prompting, this detail was not actually in my memory box. I most certainly do remember that I was smitten.] Here was a beautiful young woman talking about taking care of children, talking sensitively and amusingly about those whom I have always recognized as the most vulnerable. I was in “trouble” – I could not possibly approach her and tell her what I felt, or “ask her out”. I could not imagine that she was not already booked by one of the other young males in the group. What to do? I do remember trying to puzzle it out and considering whom I could ask. In the end I turned to David Brager because, as I recall, he was in a “steady” relationship with someone else and there was therefore no danger that I might be treading on his toes. To my hesitant question of “is she free?” his answer came both as a relief and a challenge: “yes, but why don’t you speak to her directly?”

That was how I came to know and love, Sylvia Goldschmidt. She was everything I wanted and in a way I had never encountered before. There was no bravado that I was able to muster and I remember my heart pounding more than once, both when I saw her and when I opened my mouth. Above all I worried about how she might react to the fact that I spoke with an accent and that I was still at College.

We started to go out together and get to know one another. I loved what I saw. Syl was the daughter of German Jews who had escaped Nazi Germany to go to South Africa. They then escaped South African apartheid to come to England. While the household was totally irreligious, Syl had as a young woman opted to an active membership of a Jewish upbringing. She was clearly a thinking human being with compassion for others and a willingness to share with and to care for others. On the “negative” side she had never known hardship or want, she had sailed through her school and University – indeed had jumped a class and in this respect was far superior to me. She loved music and the arts - she knew far more than I did. Would I ever be good enough for her? Fear was lurking in the background, fear that I would not come up to scratch and fear that she would be propositioned by someone in a far stronger position than I was. I was not yet earning a living, how could I possibly dare to pop the question that was burning in my mind. I remember that one of the places to which I asked her out was an Israeli folk-dancing club. It was not that I loved dancing. In fact, Israeli dancing had lost its lustre in the Diaspora, but nevertheless that was one way, I thought, in which I could illustrate to her where I had come from.

In March 1965 I finally achieved what was known as the Grad. AMIMechE and became entitled to put that string of letters behind my name. I never did. All it really did was to distinguish me as a “real” Engineer, i.e. not a car mechanic. It exempted me from Part 3 of the examinations of the

coveted Institute of Mechanical Engineers. If I wanted the full membership, I would have had to pass 4<sup>th</sup> year of the HND course [ which I took, but did not sit the exams] or sit for Part 3 of the Institute's exams before I reached the age of 38. I did not do so. I had had enough of exams and chasing shadows for a lifetime. There was a requirement to do a practical laboratory investigation as part of the post-Diploma course and again the College let me down. They should have provided the content and the wherewithal for this, but did not. Instead, the lecturer in Mechanics [ the only person I have ever seen who was able to simultaneously write two completely different things on the blackboard one with the left, the other with the right hand ] suggested I do an investigation into Load Cells which were coming into vogue at the time and which he needed for a book which he was writing. I felt insulted, let down and cheated and walked away. As I saw it, I was throwing away 6 months at College. On reflection, this was wrong. There is no doubt that with a little more self-discipline I could have done that investigation – but this is hindsight. I did not. I still have the October 1965 Record of Studies. In 4 of the 5 marked subjects I got 68-69%. In Advanced Strength of Materials, in which I was awarded 98% for “private study” and 72% for Lab work, I ended up with 35%. The comment was “College Diploma not awarded as no project submitted”. I was also dissatisfied with the College for another reason. It was evolving from the status of a “Technical College” to a semi-university sort of status called “College of Technology.” We were all aware of the fact that computers were coming in – and yet there was not a hint of it at Hendon. We were using slide rules and calculators – computers were ignored. The advantage of slide rules was obvious to me. You could not really understand their use unless you understood the basis of logarithms. The advent of the then still very expensive calculators and later the computers meant that much of the understanding of mathematics was lost. We had spent a lot of time at school doing mental and logical manipulations to see whether an answer calculated was right or wrong in

an order of magnitude – and that piece of learning seems lacking in modern education.

An advertisement had come across my path. A UK Company, importers of German sheet metalworking machinery were looking for a young Engineer. I had both that title AND the German language and was certain that I could land that job. At long last I had the opportunity of real work, real earnings – and the application of both my academic knowledge as well as my languages.

Thus it was that I went for an interview and was then employed by Pearson Panke Ltd. in Mill Hill, with whom I served from 1965 till 1971. Typical of that firm, there was no real setting down of what I was going in for in their letter of appointment. It merely read

*With reference to our telephone conversation earlier this week, we would like to confirm that it was mutually agreed that you should commence work with this Company on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1965 at a starting salary at the rate of £950 per annum.*

*We are pleased that you have decided to join us and look forward to a happy relationship.*

*Yours very truly,  
PEARSON PANKE LTD  
[ in green ink!! ]  
E. E. Michaelis.*

Pearson Panke was an agency representing a number of German machine tool and instruments manufacturers whose equipment was used in the sheet metal industry. They sold single machines, complete lines of machines and instruments used in association with these machines. Not only did they need to be sold, but they also needed to be maintained. My function was on the maintenance side. I became the liaison between the service engineers sent

over from Germany either to install or to repair and maintain the equipment. Naturally my knowledge of language stood me in good stead, although I had a great deal of additional vocabulary to learn – my mother had never used terms such as “overhead crankshaft”, if you see what I mean. I was – I believed – a good, conscientious employee and really gave it my all with interest and with the intent of furthering the interests of my employers. However, there were situations from time to time, when I had done all there was to do. At such times I used to go into my boss Mic’s room and tell him as much. It was amazing how there was never such a situation when he did not immediately come up with something else which could be done.

PP gave me something else that was of vital importance. I was not earning particularly much – but I was earning and financially finally standing on my own two feet.

Syl and I did not have an easy courtship. In fact there were quarrels and the big advantage of these was the “making up” time. We could speak about it, explain our points of view, Syl would subject them in her manner to psychological analysis – and we would resume our being together. On one such occasion when we had separated because of something I no longer recall, Syl, with two other members of our Bnai Brith group went to the south coast to visit Harold’s mother. I simply could not take it any longer. I jumped in my car and drove down. The mother opened the door and I asked to speak to Sylvia. Well, her eyes nearly popped out when she saw me. Luckily she did not hear my heart pounding. All the way down I had been rehearsing my speech and now that I needed to, it just would not come. Anyway, the gist of all this is that I asked whether she would marry me.

It is not easy, not easy at all, to pop the question and to be told: “well this is all very nice, go home and when I am back I will give you my answer”. Without a shadow of

doubt, that was not what I had expected. On the other hand, I realised that I should have expected it. There was no way that she could have acted differently. She had come with friends and was not about to spoil their weekend by returning to London with the knight on his white horse. Another period of intense fear ensued, while I waited.....

The drive home was difficult. I had to concentrate on driving, but at the same time my mind was racing. She had not said “no” – so I had hope. The enormity of what I had proposed hit me more on the way back from the coast than on the way there. I was certain that I had done the right thing, but I also knew that I had no plan of action. I rarely planned – I still do not. I am quick to come to decisions and then stick by them. I cannot understand people who make a decision and then begin to debate whether that was right or wrong. My contention has always been that whenever you make a decision you do so to the best of your ability and based on the circumstances and the sum total of your experience at that time. Later on something may change, a new fact or factor might crop up and under THAT influence you might indeed find out that you would have made a different decision, but that is hindsight. Hindsight is totally unhelpful when it comes to judging an earlier decision.

I had no concrete plans, no idea what we might do for a place to live, no real idea of how to broach it to parents and friends – and I found myself totally believing that the answer would be yes, that gorgeous girl will become mine – and I hers.

Well, as you all know, she did say yes. The phrase “I didn’t believe my luck” just did not apply. I did believe it, it was something that I so badly wanted and I would have gone to the ends of the earth – not just to the coast of England – to get it.

I seem to remember that our parents were a little disbelieving, my mother actually a little negative. It was probably driven by her fear – or knowledge – that she was losing me as a main support in her life, a responsibility which I had long resented. I am certain that Sylvia's parents were equally not quite so open armed at receiving me. I was hardly a big earner, I was just a youth with a somewhat uncertain future – and in that they were right. Maybe the Chaluziut (pioneering) - spirit in which I had grown up helped me in my certainty. I grew up with Theodor Herzl's call "If you will it, it is no dream" [ what a horrible thought that Adolf Hitler said the same in different circumstances, "wo ein Wille, da ein Weg" ]. I was in no way afraid, or apprehensive about the future.

Anyway – all these thoughts and worries evaporated when Sylvia came back and I got my coveted "yes". It was one of those situations in which you have a "yes" and then wonder, now how am I going to make use of it?

The first thing was to throw a party at which to announce our engagement. It was held at the Goldschmidts. All our friends were there – I was made to stay out of sight – and at some lull in the conversation Sylvia announced "Have you heard the latest?? Sylvia and David are engaged". For a moment there was silence, then someone said "which David?" and then the penny dropped – and all were congratulating her – and then us, when I had entered the room....

Next came the problem of housing. No way could we afford to buy a house, renting also seemed expensive and I came up with one of those "impossible" suggestions. There were so many people who got Council-assisted accommodation, why not us? No – thought Sylvia, that is for the poor and unemployed, one needed so many "points" in a points system and we had none, nor did we deserve any – after all we may not have had any money, but we were not "poor" [ it makes me wonder how she defined that



term in those days....]. Nothing daunted, we made an appointment with the housing department and sat in a waiting room with many others who were being called up one by one to about 4 or 5 windows behind which sat a clerk who interviewed them. It was supposed to be "confidential" but it was not difficult to overhear what was being said. At one of these windows a man was being treated like a piece of dirt by the clerk. We were incensed. It was OK for the Clerk to say "no, go away" – but it was absolutely not OK to be as rude and uncompassionate as she was.

We then registered, or maybe only got the forms with which to register and returned home. The injustice was burning in our ears and we wrote a letter to the head of the Housing Services complaining about that clerk. It did not really matter to us whether our position might be compromised – after all this was just done "on spec" – but no public servant had a right to treat a member of the public like this.

Our letter struck home. We were invited for a meeting with that Head of Housing who was quite apologetic about the behaviour of that woman, a known problem. As a by-the-way he also wanted to tell us that recently they had come to an agreement with a local builder who had – with their financial help – split and redecorated one of the Council properties on the understanding that for the first x-years the flat would have to be offered to someone on the Council list, albeit at about double the rent which ordinary Housing Benefit Tenants were paying at the time. Would we like it?

Well, even at double the going rate of rent this was still dirt cheap compared with private rented accommodation and we ended up creating a love nest in New Oak Road, East Finchley. Our own, self contained, 1-bedroomed little flat which was heaven!

We married twice. Once was the civil wedding on 2 April 1966.



We were rather enamoured by Rabbi Raymond Apple in those days. We had listened to him speak, I had been teaching Hebrew under him and so we selected him. It just happened that this was a congregation affiliated to the United Synagogue, i.e. Orthodox, which also meant that in future if our children had to prove that they were Jewish, then there would be no doubt of it.

Six weeks before we were due to be married Sylvia got sick with glandular Fever. There was doubt whether we should postpone, but I would have none of it. The question was asked for which parent the chair was which had been placed under the Chuppa and it was explained that it was for neither of them, it was for the bride...

And so we began our married life.

In April 1962 my mother decided the time had come to move out of Golders Green. With a great deal of difficulty, but aided by her Self Aid For Refugees organisation, she obtained the funds to buy 1 Neeld Crescent. It was much larger than Woodstock Avenue. Woodstock Avenue had been a big problem – including the need to eradicate woodworm and dry rot. Those mushrooms in the floor boards were really something to behold! The advantage of Neeld Crescent was that with 5 bedrooms it was big enough to sublet upstairs and thus ensure some income to cover the cost of the mortgage. I did the move myself, with the help of another ex-Israeli Yom-Tov Entebbe, the “Buggerist”. He was a larger than life Yemeni who gave that word as his profession when interviewed by the home office on arrival. I hired a lorry – you could then, my driving licence covered that class of vehicle as well and had great fun driving it. We were exhausted at the end of it and vowed “never again” to move all that furniture on our own!

## 1966 – Work of a married man

In starting to write about my working life, I suppose I must begin with Pearson Panke. It was the start of my “adult” employment, all the studying and exam passing which I had achieved was finally behind me and I had the feeling of “I am on my way”. My involvement in the company was neither on the commercial, nor really any engineering sides – that was being handled by the Directors of the Company and their salesmen and without doubt far better than I would have been able to do. When Mic had a drawing in front of him – irrespective of whether it was a mechanical one, or a circuit diagram, he was able to read these with ease and thoroughly “understand” them to a point which was actually bewildering to me. I had never learned electronics and that was sorely missing in my qualification. I was used much more for the liaison between clients and suppliers on the maintenance front. The procurement of spares, the support of the maintenance staff who came over from Germany, the purchase of materials in the UK. It often necessitated my being away from London and I began to learn the tedium of a “non-job” in which I felt uncomfortable by not being included in any decision making, having no real responsibility for the development of the Company. I cannot say that I blamed the directors for the way I was being handled – after all, the company was theirs, I was a hired hand and used where I was needed most. They had never pretended that I might progress in responsibility. My salary arrived on time every month, I was being treated correctly, but there was something clearly lacking. I did not “belong”. Very generously, the company paid for a restaurant lunch in Mill Hill every day we were at the office. Tony provided delicious food, without doubt – but I ate on my own when more than one of the directors was around, not with them at their table.

From time to time Mic took me along on a trip to visit a client or a potential customer. I never understood why he

did so, because other than being there I had no function whatsoever. Did they see it as impressing the client by having more than one representative of P&P making the journey, arriving in factories across the Midlands and Wales? Maybe.... I would think that the contrary was true – if only one of the visitors had anything to say, the other could only be a hindrance. It became even clearer that I had no future in the company when Stephen Panke, the son of the founding family, joined the firm and I felt that I had slid down another rung on that ladder of being someone in the firm.

Often I spent weeks at a customer, interpreting for the German engineers and “getting my hands dirty” by assisting in the dismantling or assembling of the heavy machinery. Above all I learned from them the importance of the visual – clean and tidy installation. Nothing was allowed to be haphazard. Electric wires on the machines were fixed meticulously, so that clear lines, perpendicular bends and individual markings ensured that there would never be any difficulty in identifying which wire was which. Cleanliness at the work place was paramount – there was real pride in the work place! There was such an amazing contrast with the sloppiness of English engineering, where corners were always cut and often nothing was properly finished. The existence of apprenticeships in Germany shone through as an amazing contrast to the English practices. We were installing sheet metal working machinery in UK factories, presses, rollers, bottle top making and screwing. There were also the electronic guards – often photo-electric, which stopped the machines instantaneously when hands protruded into an area of danger. Another series of machines were laboratory testers of sheet metal, in which measurement of strength, extension, friction and the like were made to ascertain the quality of the material.

That was the time when I went in to the MD and asked for his guidance. I did not drink any alcohol and the people I

associated with clearly did. How was I to handle this? His advice was that I ordered some bitter lemon, as no one could tell whether I had any alcohol in there or not, with the result that I instantly became known as “Mr Bitter Lemon” to all and sundry. Several memorable such visits remain with me. There was the time when we visited the ICI foods division to supply some Erwin Sick Photo Electric guards. The dyes – deep indigo blue for example – used for the food colouring really put me off. Rubrey Owen in the Industrial Midlands supplied chassis for lorries and buses. We supplied the then largest mechanical press in the world, which in a single pressing was able to form one of these components. Essentially such a press consisted of a bed, two uprights and a crown all bolted together, with a slide moving vertically between those uprights, forming the raw material on the bed. Sep, the engineer nearly went mad with the language problems on that trip. He was a typical Bavarian whose ability to communicate in English was inversely proportional to the square of the distance between him and me. Machine parts were lifted and fitted into place by the factory’s enormous gantry cranes, with their driver high up in a control cabin. It was the norm to use hand signals for up-down-left and right. Now Sep was used to giving voice commands rather than to gesticulate these signals and had worked mainly inside Germany. So this enormous 42-foot machine crown was lifted up, was hovering some distance above the uprights and was to be placed on them gently, so that metal surfaces did not clonk when they met. A highly delicate operation! “Ab, Ab, Ab” Sep was calling, expecting the monster to slowly lower – when Up, Up, Up... heard the crane driver – soon coming close to the roof of the factory. Sep nearly had a heart attack over this and never again uttered a word when directing a crane.

I spent many months at Vauxhall Motors in Ellesmere Port near Liverpool, when the company was installing a whole street of presses which were to be used for the manufacture of a new model of Vauxhall cars. To impress

the client I was given a Vauxhall car to drive and regularly went up on Sunday nights, to return to London on Fridays. During the week I stayed in a Thistle Hotel just outside Chester. It was relatively cheap, certainly comfortable and lonesome. I loved the work up there, but hated the “being alone”. I hated having to explain my accent to anyone who heard me speak. I was bored with canteen and restaurant food and could drive that distance with my eyes shut. The telephone was still a luxury and Sylvia was far away... One day I asked one of the Vauxhall engineers how it came about that they all congregated in a particular part of that emerging huge factory. It turned out that this was where there was so much steel, part of the construction of the manufacturing plant being assembled there, that their personal telephone pagers did not function there and they could not be found by anyone calling them.... No mobile phones yet in those days.... The personal messenger was the height of development – you got a text message to tell you someone had called, so that you then went to the nearest phone and called them back....

The Ericsson sheet metal testing equipment also needed regular, annual maintenance and I drove/accompanied their engineer from customer to customer for this purpose. We befriended the young man over the years and occasionally invited him to our home. Those men were as lonesome on their stints abroad as I felt when away from home. On one occasion he explained that he had learned a lot of English on that particular trip. When asked what it was that he had learned, the answer was very direct: “I learned the difference between certainly and certainly not!”

One of the main machinery suppliers was the firm of Weingarten. It was they who manufactured those large presses. They had, of course, an export department and that department was – equally of course – staffed by bi- and tri-lingual staff who all had doctorates. They produced the most eye catching brochures describing the equipment in detail and accompanied by many photographs and

illustrations. Again and again we entreated them to allow us to proof read the English wording prior to them going to press. This was to no avail, because – presumably – arrogance prevailed. They could not understand that theirs was not native English and that errors detracted from the seriousness of the business at hand. At that time a new series of advanced Percussion Presses had been designed in which the momentum of the slide was transferred to the metal being formed in the tool on the machine bed rather than relying on hydraulic power to bring about those changes. Weingarten printed most beautiful brochures in which they described the basic machine and extolled its capabilities and added that some items could be purchased at a later stage if and when required and were not necessarily part of the initial outlay. A sentence which then became famous in our repertoire of jokes was then printed: “Accessories are available for posterior applications”. We often laughed about this as a prime example why native speakers of a language must be consulted before such clangers are distributed.

Another of my tasks at Pearson Panke was to purchase whatever materials and equipment were needed in the firm and to coordinate arrival of spares and repair items for use by the maintenance engineers. Those materials were sent to site and were available for our engineers when and where required. It gave me a superb grounding in both the scheduling of purchases and the administration needed for importation and transportation of these.

On one, most unusual, occasion a whole drum of cable was left over. The electric cable had been used for the commissioning of a group of new machines and clearly the machine supplier had overestimated the amount which would be needed. It was now the property of PP and we had no idea what to do with it – or indeed, what it was worth.



From the cable drum I knew the name of the manufacturer in Stuttgart and contacted them about this. They, in turn, guided me to their UK agents whom I then contacted about this matter. I discovered that the agent had died some time earlier and that his wife was struggling to keep that agency business going, but she could not tell me anything immediately as she did not even know that they were representing the German supplier – U.I. Lapp. I reacted very strongly. I had been most impressed by the cables. In England at that time, when an engineer needed to connect one part of a machine with another, using electric wires, he prepared a bunch of single wires of the correct length, pushed these through an armoured tube [sometimes rigid, but often flexible] and then marked each wire with an identifying tag at each end. There were special sticky tapes with numbers/letters – or special plastic clips with these markings which were clipped on to the wires. Each wire size required a different diameter identifying tag – and the whole thing was most cumbersome and time consuming. Of course you also quickly ran out of the most commonly used numbers/letters – and supplies of part kits were always a problem. Here now was a firm who manufactured flexible, readymade, multi-core cables in many different types and sizes and these conductors were already identified by imprinted numbers or were colour coded. Not only that, but the flexible cables had a metal braid on them with an outer transparent layer of PVC which gave the cable a modicum of armouring. The transparent outer sheath gave one the feeling of confidence – you could look into that cable and see that there was quality here.



*One of the Lectriflex brochures*

The thought began to gnaw at me – here was an opportunity – there just HAD to be a market for this product in England – and there was no agent of any standing for it.

I contacted the company and told them that I wanted to see them. It happened to be the same time when PP sent me on a visiting tour of their suppliers and both Sylvia and I were in Germany for a while. I had been with PP for some time already and a visit to the manufacturing plant had been senseless until now because I needed first to get to know the equipment and to know – or learn - what questions to pose. Just to visit a plant and to be impressed by the way it was assembled was pointless, of course.

We diverted to Stuttgart and sat on Mr Lapp's doorstep till his wife returned. It transpired that it was his birthday that day and she was waiting for him to come home in order to give him the inordinate number of wrapped gifts which awaited him in his sumptuous lounge. We were not deterred and, to her probable consternation, continued our vigil till his return. I was welcomed by Mr Lapp. I joked that his garage was bigger than our house. I told him who I

was and of my background, what I had discovered about his existing agent, that I knew nothing of electric cable but was certain that there must be a market there. Also – that I had no money to invest in stock and that I was not about to borrow any. If he wanted to have stocks in England, he would have to finance that.

No one was more surprised than I when his reaction was “OK – you have it, you are my agent now, let us try it out.”

So there I was, holding an agency – but what do you do with it in practice?

I founded Lectriflex Cables and Accessories Ltd.

My pleasure of playing with words helped me create this name. It was important to me to have something which told precisely what it was about. It was also at that time, I think, that I read the book by Dr. Edward DeBono who had coined the expression of “Lateral Thinking”. Wikipedia helps me to the specifics:

*Lateral thinking is a term coined by Edward de Bono, for the solution of problems through an indirect and creative approach. Lateral thinking is about reasoning that is not immediately obvious and about ideas that may not be obtainable by using only traditional step-by-step logic.*

*The term first appeared in the title of de Bono's book New Think: The Use of Lateral Thinking, published in 1967.*

U.I.Lapp, as I have said before, were first class in their marketing. They created beautifully clear catalogues with many pictures and tabulated technical information, which they were willing for me to have for free. They also sent me short lengths as samples of their cable products and I began to telephone companies and learn the names of the individuals who were responsible for the purchasing of electric control cables. With the catalogues I sent off short

lengths of the cable itself, so that they could see and touch the material which I was offering. I spoke of the “cables with sex appeal” and that was what it was and it caught on. Before too long orders began to come in. At that point I would order the exact amount of cable and have it shipped directly to the customers. I had neither capital outlay nor any need for stocks, let alone an office or a warehouse. I was, of course, still employed at PP and it was my lunch hours and weekends which now vanished.

Down the road from where I had lived in Golders Green lived Walter and Linda Blue. Walter was one of the Kindertransport children. It is never right to speak inclusively of any group of human beings, but Sylvia always maintained that one could recognize a Kindertransport child. They were so damaged by their experience of being torn away from their family, often never to see them again and having to make their own way in the world. My Aunt Hanna Koebner was another example of these. Both Walter and Hanna represented an exception in that they had married and brought up children. And on the face of it had managed to “normalise” their existence and yet, they were “different”. Walter was a Civil Engineer and I knew that he had landed a UK representation of a company called NOE Formwork. They manufactured metal components needed for the pouring of concrete in the building industry. Two items of their range were particularly ingenious. In order to cast a circular column, such as for the support of a bridge, special circular forms had to be manufactured which were very expensive and which were destroyed after the concrete had dried. Using the simple principle that the circumference of a circle is given by the formula  $\pi D$  (where  $D$  is the diameter of the required circle), NOE manufactured steel shutters which were curved with a radius proportional to  $\pi$ . In this way virtually any circle circumference could be constructed by using the appropriate number of these standard metal plates, bolted together. This not only speeded up the assembly of the shutters, but they could also be used time and again. The

other clever item were the “nuts” with which parallel shutters were held together. Traditionally threaded steel rods were used with ordinary nuts at each end. These – like all nuts, were screwed and unscrewed with spanners, a slow and laborious task. Some clever engineer at NOE had seen his child spinning a propeller off a metal spiral. The propeller was simply pushed by a sleeve which was free to move between the handle on the spiral rod and the propeller which was threaded on to the rod. By an upward movement of the sleeve, the propeller was rotated on the rod and accelerated upwards to fly once the spiral rod had been cleared. They used the same principle horizontally. The traditional threaded rods were produced with a spiral thread and a wing nut fitted on the end and hit with a hammer spun forward to tighten the shutter in place. That was quick and easy to operate and saved an inordinate amount of time on construction sites. Again, metal forms were supplied which could be re-used again and again, instead of the traditional timber shutters.

Walter and I came to an agreement to become partners. He was no longer employed, was not fully occupied with the civil engineering agency and was able to also deal with the growing electric cable traffic which passed across our desk. We agreed that any profits made would be his and his alone, as he had to feed a wife and child, while I was employed at PP.

This worked fine for a while, but eventually Walter became worried as he could no longer do it all himself. He wanted me to resign from PP. For a while I was able to fob him off. My argument was simple: I was not prepared to leave my job as long as he was not able to feed even one family from the income of the business.

Eventually Walter came with an ultimatum - he was not prepared to carry two businesses.

Serious conversations ensued between Sylvia and me. I needed to leave PP, but naturally not without her blessing. I was the young, excited individual who was prepared to take the risk, Sylvia was the more careful, realising the dangers of failure on our young family. Eventually my wishes prevailed.

I was so certain that I was on to a winner here and how could it ever grow if I remained employed?

I just HAD to take that risk....

It was at this point that Walter and I agreed to part company again. We certainly parted as friends and agreed that he would take the Civil Engineering side [ which clearly was his baby ] and I would take the cables, which I had brought to the joint venture.

I learned very quickly that there were agencies which sold formed, but not trading companies for precious little outlay. We bought such a company and changed its name to Lectriflex Cables and Accessories. Sylvia also became a Director as well as Company Secretary and we were off.

I no longer remember how long it took before the income actually paid me a salary. I do know that we never, at any time, had the worry of wondering how we would feed ourselves. I also learned how Mic at Pearson Panke was always able to tell me what else there was that needed to be done, Never again and probably for the rest of my life, did I have a moment in which I had no idea what else there was to do.

Initially I was really on my own, doing all the office stuff and visiting potential clients. Sylvia saved us the vital initial outlay of a secretary by typing my correspondence. That was long before the advent of computers. We had a manual typewriter [ which we had received as a wedding gift from PP]. In order not to demonstrate quite how

miniscule our operation was Sylvia would manipulate the invoice numbers, so that clients – if they bothered about it at all – would see an apparent increase in the number of invoices we had issued. She would fill in the gaps by giving the missing numbers to new customers as they appeared. We continued to rely heavily on the sales literature from U.I.Lapp, but I was a firm believer of taking meter-long samples to clients and carried these slung over my shoulder. Soon I acquired the nickname of “Galley Slave”.

My hunch had been right. The flexible cables impressed many people who were convinced as I was that they were a good product. In a way I had located a niche market in which I had no competition – simply because there was no other supplier. The main reason for this was that the UK was not yet using the highly useful multicore cable. Despite the fact that the UK was still non-metric and the cables I was selling were metric the business took off. Presumably the industry, if it had thought of it all, had decided that nothing would fit. Connectors, plugs and sockets, terminals all were still made and supplied in Whitworth gauges. What they had ignored was the huge decline in UK manufacturing and the huge increase in imports from Europe. Whether England was eventually to go metric was almost immaterial – those materials were wanted and could be used.

Before long, the administrative work grew to a point where it became too much and we advertised for a secretary. She lived not too far away and came every day to our home – one bedroom had been designated the “office” and became the centre of our commercial activities. Angela was a tall English woman, with somewhat affectatious speech, a mane of black hair making a ski-slope down to her shoulders, who soon did all the admin which accrued. I always dictated into a dictating machine and would hand over the tapes for typing. At the end of the day the letters – one per page – were ready for me in a large folder with

blotting paper for the dividing sheets, a relic from by-gone days when we used to use an ink fountain pen to sign letters. That ink took a while to dry and would often smudge – hence the need for a way to soak up the excess. We installed a clattering telex machine. These were a combination of the telephone and typewriter – a forerunner of the fax which became the combination of the photocopier and the phone. They were efficient beasts, sparing of telephone time. A message would be typed on them and parallel with the type appearing on a roll of paper on the machine, it also produced an 8-hole tape. The machine would read the text from the punched tape and the line was open only for the time that was necessary to go through the recognition protocol at the subscriber's end and the duration of transmission of the message. Thus the "other side" paid for any answers, a far shorter period than a telephone call would take. The stupid thing about these machines was that for reasons only the Post Office knew (yes, in those days the Post and Telephone services were offered by a single nationalized company), they kept the telex line circuits totally separate from the telephone network, so that one had to order a separate phone line for that machine.

Eventually, Karen was expected and really there was no space in our private home for the company. I searched for some commercial property for rent and was horrified at the costs. Eventually I hatched a scheme – I would buy a second small house in the suburbs and work from there. Thus it was that the office moved to a 3-bedroomed, semi detached house at 101 Chanctonbury Way, about 5 minutes drive from home. We had all the space we needed and the "business was out of the house". There was only one disadvantage: I could no longer hop into the office at any time of the day or night, especially when the telex machine began to rattle..... On the other hand, we sublet the upstairs to a tenant whose rent offset the mortgage and we really had what would have been a perfect set-up.



Before moving into 101, we had ordered the necessary communications to be installed there and naturally this consisted of phone and telex. The company had to lay a new cable from the pole in the road to the house and combined the lines into a single armoured telephone cable complete with a steel Catenary cable by which to hang the new lines. This was therefore a much heavier cable compared with the telephone wires leading to all the adjacent houses. Some alert neighbour noticed the new cable to 101 even before we had moved in and reported suspicious activity in the house. Eventually, because the wheels of a local authority grind very slowly, we were notified by Barnet Borough Council that we had brought about a change of usage of the property and were to desist and move out forthwith. I at first tried to think of ways out. No one could stop me working from my home and I considered claiming that I had separated from my wife. But not only would that have been a lie, we also had another problem. By then our turnover had increased considerably and I was no longer able to direct each and every delivery directly to its purchasing client. Also, I did not want U.I.Lapp to know all the addresses of my clients. There was always a nagging suspicion about their ways of working and we really did not see eye-to-eye on some fundamental points. Storage had therefore become a problem and clearly a private house in the suburbs was not the place for this. Whether I liked it or not, I would have to solve this.

The activities also grew in another respect. A single secretary was no longer able to cope – we needed a second pair of hands. To a large degree I left that to Angela, after all it was she who would have to work with that other person and a succession of individuals started to come and go – none lasted for very long. Eventually Sylvia spoke to our latest addition and we discovered that Angela was attempting to rule the roost and make the life of the second person a misery. Eventually we said goodbye to

Angela, much to her anger and great surprise. From then on peace ruled in Lectriflex.

I was always a firm believer in using modern and efficient equipment to make life easier and quicker. Thus it was that our mechanical typewriters were replaced by electrically driven machines, first one in which the letter levers were activated electrically, and then by so called golf ball machines where the old levers for each letter had been replaced by a ball on whose surface all the typewriter characters were present, and the printing was achieved by the machine rotating this ball and presenting the different letters to leave an imprint by hitting a carbonated typewriter ribbon. It was amazing to see how fast these golf balls could move and they were indeed much more efficient than the earlier mechanical machines. We became particularly modern when I won a competition announced by the Adler company and got the first prize – a programmable typewriter. Sylvia and I went down to the offices to collect our prize and were amazed at the reluctance with which Adler parted with that machine. They really hoped that we would accept the £1000 in cash rather than take that machine away with us. In hindsight we should have taken the money. They never fully trained us in the programming and use of the machine and worse – soon after the first word processing computers appeared on the market, making all typewriters obsolete.

I mentioned that there was suspicion of Lapp and maybe I ought to explain. Their catalogue was extensive and technically superb. They always claimed to be the manufacturers, but in reality it would have been impossible for them to manufacture the entire range on their own. They never owned up to whether or what they actually manufactured themselves and I felt that this was not right. On top of that I had a sales theory totally different to Lapp. As far as I was concerned and my staff members were frequently lectured in that direction – our job was to sell expensive service. If we also sold some cable in the

process, then so much the better. If a client wanted something out of the catalogue by a particular date then he was going to get it whether or not Lapp had it available by then. Lapp could not comprehend that I was loyal to them as long as it did not damage the relationship between my company and our clients. If a material was needed and Lapp could not deliver it in time I would find it elsewhere. After all, if I just shrugged my shoulders and said “sorry, we cannot help”, the client himself would source his needs elsewhere. I made no secret of my approach and actions but it stuck in the throat of my main suppliers. And thus it was that we moved to East Finchley premises in Bedford Road.

This too was essentially once upon a time a private dwelling house. At the back was a large yard with a structure on it which housed a small lamp making factory. We, like they, were tenants in the building. Our offices were upstairs, the downstairs rooms devoted to a modicum of stock. We were LAPP agents and supplied their cable. Multicore cable often required multi-pin connectors and Lapp had acquired a small German manufacturer by the name of “Contact” who manufactured these connectors. However nothing in their range really was equal to their arch rivals HTS and again, without making a secret of it, we sold the better quality. Our turnover increased, we now employed a team of three or four salesmen. At one time I insisted on hiring a woman to represent our company. I was convinced – and it turned out to be so – that in the male dominated world of engineers and buyers an attractive saleswoman had a definite edge over her male counterparts. One of the team became Sales Director. We began to be and sound like, a serious outfit, no longer the back-street one man show which started it all. We had an accounts office, stock control ad so forth.

I was a very different employer from the norm. For one, I never expected anyone to do any task unless I was able to do the same myself. The exception to that came when I

introduced the first computer into the company at a time when the invoice numbers which we generated really did not warrant such a machine. I however was adamant. I wanted to have the stock control, the accountancy controls and all those other things which allowed one to control the daily life of a company on computer. Software was a major problem – I could find no off the shelf programmes which satisfied all that I demanded and for a considerable period hired a couple of software writers to tailor make what I wanted. We eventually achieved this, but at a huge cost which really went far beyond what it should have. The truth was that I did not care. Money was never my goal, although I was the first to admit that it was much better with it than without it. I also believed in paying staff above the average salaries, knowing without a doubt that I would thereby end up with a loyalty from the staff. I always argued that it was absolutely the wrong policy to offer low wages and to be skimping and penny pinching. I knew that at least 40% of the extra salary would be paid by Government, so to speak, because we were making profits and I preferred to invest some of that money in the staff rather than pay out more taxes if profit increased. Equally, I did not instigate any form of clock-watching and never objected if a member of staff needed to have some time off or make a private phone call. I totally accepted that they each had a life outside the office and were absolutely entitled to it. This attitude reaped so much good, it was quite amazing. I really fail to see why other employers do not follow the same principles. Low wages, prohibition of the private from the work place are nothing other than wrong and narrow minded. When they need to, the staff will take the time anyway – so it may as well be with the sanction of the employer.

Across the road from our premises in Bedford Road happened to be an electrical wholesale company by the name of Cables and Flexibles. It sold the common old garden English cables and switchgear to local electrical contractors and to industry – all the sort of stuff which we

did not do. One day their owner appeared in my office and explained that he wanted to retire, would I be interested in taking over his firm. He had one sales lady at the counter who had been with him for many years, there were a couple of outside representatives who visited industry and sold their wares – they had space at the rear where they held stock - the proposition really made sense in every respect. At that stage we were able to serve customers better because we began to hold some material in stock. It necessitated some equipment – we purchased a fork lift truck, cable de-reeling machine and the like. The added side of Cables and Flexibles considerably widened the platform on which we operated.

The owner of Cables and Flexibles said another important sentence to me: “You Jews all know one another, maybe you know someone who would like to buy my house?”. I could have taken umbrage at that sentence, those two words “you Jews”.... I had no idea that he saw me as one. I never thought of myself as a Jew. I had grown up in a country where everyone was a Jew and religion was a foreign concept to me. I always thought that religion was necessary in the Diaspora to remind them who they were [if the host nation did not do so for them] but in Israel it was part of the fabric of everyday life and therefore need not be accentuated. I never came across anti-Semitism, was spared all the horror that this could bring and in this instance dismissed the phrase as anything that might be threatening. We accepted an invitation to visit Bill in his home to see this house out of sheer curiosity. We certainly did not know anyone who might be looking and we did not consider looking ourselves. We were very comfortable in our home in Avondale Avenue, a 4 bed roomed, semi detached house, into which I had put a great deal of effort and had decorated/renovated it. Now here, in Bill's home for the first time came to me the realisation that while we were very comfortable with what we had, there were nicer places! And so it came to be that we began to look for another place to live in.

One day, while out looking at prospective buildings, we were travelling along Totteridge Lane and there was a For Sale sign outside this one building. You could not see the house – there were only two pillars at the bottom of a drive and I turned into that drive, curious to see what was hidden beyond that row of old oak trees. The house was locked, clearly empty, there was no one about. I was determined to get in. I went to the rear to find what seemed like a park. A trio of silver birches in the middle of a large lawn growing from what seemed to be a single stem. You could not tell whether these were three trees which had fused together or a single tree with three upright stems. The bottom of that large garden was out of sight. The back door was open and we entered into the kitchen. At some time earlier a part of the ceiling of that kitchen had fallen down and was lying in a heap of plaster on the cork floor tiles. It was a wonderful house. Large amazing windows in every room, four bed rooms, but the downstairs was much larger than anything we had ever seen. There was a second lounge, a downstairs toilet, two outhouses, one fitted out with racks for storing fruit. But above all, out of whatever window one looked, there was garden and no neighbouring house could be seen. I went downstairs, found a small broom and dustpan and a bin and began to shovel that ceiling debris into the bin. Sylvia asked what I was doing and I explained that this was MY ceiling which had come crashing down, it was damaging the floor and I wanted us to buy the house. It was, without doubt, an example of love at first sight. It was named White Gables, because its gables were painted white and they would eventually be ours.

Sylvia took some convincing. It turned out that she had had the details of this house from an estate agent some time earlier but had discarded it because it was beyond the financial limit which we had set ourselves. It was simply too expensive. I did not care about the cost. I knew in my gut that whatever the costs now, this house would intrinsically grow in value because of the privacy it gave the occupiers.

All houses were bought at £x and sold at £y some years later, but in reality one could not buy any more bread with the £x at the start of the period than one could with £y at the end. Here was a property which would grow in value intrinsically because it really was unique for London. Detached, well built, in an acre of ground and only half a mile from the underground. It was unrepeatable. And so it was that our solicitor Jeff Green began the complicated purchasing procedure for us to acquire the house. As part of the agreement I handed over an envelope with £5000 in cash which would clinch the purchase so that the publicly known figure would be lessened by that amount. It was only at the end, when the deal had actually been signed that Jeff told us that for a while it looked as if the mortgage company of the seller was not prepared to release him from his bond. He had been a developer who had run into financial trouble and that envelope was part of his extrication.... We have been in the house for 35 years now. I have often said that each time I go home it is as if I am going on holiday. If we have any chance at all and for whatever length of time still lies ahead, I want us to remain here and die here. I have that vision that if ever we cannot get upstairs any more, we will simply move to the downstairs only, but remain here we must. I do not particularly feel at home in England, but I do in White Gables. It is where we belong, where our children grew up, where our grandchildren now can come to visit us. I cannot conceive of ever being somewhere else.

But I digress, I was speaking of work and of Lectriflex.... As the company was growing and our turnover increasing it became clear to me that Bedford Road could not continue to house us. It was simply not suitable to operate a commercial entity out of what in the past had been two private houses across the street from each other. I had moved my office to the attic of the Cables and Flexibles building. The only advantage was that each time I went in or out of my office I would run up those stairs – 3 flights – and thus get my exercise. Beyond that I never did any!

I no longer recall how it came about, but I learned that the medical concern of Hoechst was selling a 3-acre complex in Woodside Park called the Paddocks, which I bought.



*The Paddocks, the Western end. Top left was my office.*

I bought it because it gave me the opportunity to work in a similar environment in which I had become accustomed to live – away from the hubbub of civilisation, in the middle of green, with a large, central lawn. It really was unique and ideal.

Hoechst had been slaughtering horses at The Paddocks and using the blood for the manufacture of serum. So it was that we had a complex of buildings including stables and laboratory facilities as well as a bungalow where the administration was centered. There was another house on the site as well, so that I was able to sublet a number of units which again helped with the purchasing costs outlay. The stables remained stables and many local individuals would keep their horses there. I attempted to make one of them responsible for the collection of the rent and that always remained a problem as the rent was always in arrears. But it was an amazing place from which to work – we were a piece of rural habitation, remote from noise, undisturbed and could always park. I was relatively close to home and for a short period cycled to work. Not along roads – but across Totteridge Common and Totteridge Valley where there are unpaved paths and no cars.... I remember particularly the only time when I was directly involved at the stables. It had been raining and raining,



and I got a call to say that the place was flooding. Flooding was an understatement. The gutters in the road could not cope, the discharge went into a ditch which ran the length of the paddocks behind the stables. These ditches had not been maintained for many years – it was unclear whether it was the responsibility of the Council or the golf club adjoining our property. We released all the horses which, in part, were in water up to their chests by the time we got to them. When eventually the water subsided there was, in reality, very little damage. The wooden stables had been there for many years and just dried out. We did however have to create a new riding area. We ordered sawdust from a specialist supplier who spread this on the riding area. He was a well known Borough councillor. Standing there, watching his men at work, I asked him about the wood products and their usage. I was amazed to learn that he had the wood shavings in all grades, the finest being like powder. He had supplied it to one of the well known UK sausage manufacturers who added it to their food product and described it on the label as being “vegetable matter”!

I have said before that I was not a conventional employer. I did not drive the sales by targets, I rarely planned forward, I tended much more to grasp at opportunities if and when I saw some. I must add that I had had no training in running any organisation, never studied economics or marketing and whatever I did came by instinct and was not necessarily thought out. I was also very trusting – which became my downfall. Sometimes it was a gentle bump, eventually it became an almighty crash.

I was also getting bored of electric cable. I had a sales director and staff. As far as I was concerned they could easily run that side of the business. There was little I could add or teach them in that direction. The relationship with Lapp was getting tenser. On one occasion a mistake was made. An order was placed for cable from a competitor. When that was telexed out we discovered that it had been

sent to Lapp instead of their competitor. Lapp had attempted to set me a monetary target for the annual sales as they did to all their agents – and I refused it. I argued that we work diligently and were at least as interested in a larger turnover as they were, but that I was not prepared to accept them wielding a whip. It was then that I discovered that Mr Lapp was in England, visiting some of our customers without telling me that he was doing so. In reality it did not matter, but what hurt was that I had always told Lapp that if they cannot supply I would get the material for our customer from another source. I demanded that he understand this – and he took it as disloyalty. And so it came that we no longer were sole agents, but simply bought from them whatever we needed .... We knew that while there were some clients who would go direct, the greater part of our profits came from small quantities of material where the high price did not really matter so much. For large lengths the margins were always depressed and I was still convinced that our task was to sell service, not cables and their accessories. Cables and Flexibles also changed in character. They concentrated on the sale of cable in larger quantities to industry and no longer served the domestic electrician who required a myriad of different pieces of switchgear which the wholesaler was expected to hold in stock.

In other words, the companies began to fuse in their activities. Yes – the C& F were more focused on British Standard cables and added the German flexibles, just as the Lectriflex staff members were now able to offer UK-type material to their contacts in industry.

We began to source material from new suppliers, notably among them a company from Norway called Norsk Kabelfabrik and a Finnish cable making company called Nokia. Apart from their superb neoprene covered flexible power cables which opened doors for us to major industrial engineering companies, the one brought us a great personal friendship with their Sales Director Egil Ljosland,

the other a catastrophe after unbeknown to me they had dismissed their UK Managing Director SR.

The only good that came to me from the Nokia camp was a visit to their factory where, for the first time, I observed a fully automated manufacturing plant making multi-paired and screened communication cable. I stood before that monster and felt as though I was observing a symphony being played. Levers moved in and out, assemblies were spinning – an arm opened and a replacement reel was inserted for a particular strand which had emptied a spool – and with all that movement and rotation a long hot sausage of a cable was emerging at the end, being reeled onto a huge wooden drum. I think this was the only time in my life when I was actually awe-struck while observing a production line. I had seen many. I worked at some while still a student. On the whole they were noisy, dirty and frankly boring. As an engineer I should have been interested each time when visiting a factory but, with this one exception, I never was.

As we had a decent income and the company was working well, I was also able to expand my horizon and to look at other things. The entrepreneur in me was curious and the gambler in me interested. With hindsight it is evident that several attempts were badly executed, but in others I was simply too early. I knew there was a future but society around me was not ready for it.

One such deviation was a man called Spencer Morris. He was a small podgy bald headed man, very full of himself and his capabilities, who sought a partner with money to support his efforts of trade with Nigeria. He drove a Rolls Royce, lived in a most expensive flat in Marble Arch and had an even more podgy Jewish wife. Sylvia did not like him but I was fascinated. He first made contacts in Nigeria when he realised that much of Western Technology was crumbling, unused in developing countries because they had no idea how to service the equipment. He started a

company which produced service manuals which were written like comic strips – all in pictures. With these, even illiterate people could service equipment [ provided they had the spare parts, of course]. He seems to have given a lecture about this at a UN committee somewhere when a Nigerian Colonel spoke to him and expressed his interest. That man was to become a General and ended up as President Murtala Mohamed of Nigeria until his assassination in 1976. While in power he called Spencer and said “I want you here”. I no longer remember the details of the next story but Spencer also boasted to have been the only white person he knew who had been elected to become a Chief of some Nigerian Tribe. Anyway, he was cultivating large scale trade to that country, intending always to be the middleman who would earn introductory commissions on such deals. He maintained that it was never accepted to arrive in Nigeria by air in the economy class – it had to be the first class because of the people you met and those who observed you. I went on one such trip with him to this country which he dubbed “the land of fascinating horror” – and right he was. You could not move without bribing people. Already at customs, if you did not proffer some notes you would be held back for an inordinate time. At the hotel you were asked “how long will you be here” – and whatever the answer, you had to deposit the cash for the entire duration of your stay. Lagos was the most chaotic place I had ever seen. This was already after the cement crisis in which more of the stuff had been shipped to the country than could ever have been used and the port was choked with ships hoping to unload... The men you met in their posh offices were “measured” by the size of their air conditioners. They often lived in a shanty town but there was a Mercedes parked outside. We visited four towns - Lagos, of course, Ibadan and Port Harcourt in the south, Kaduna in the north. In each we had high powered talks about developments and needs and purchasing offices in London.... The only such visit that really sticks in my mind was in Lagos, the office of the Minister for Development whose name now escapes

me. I remember saying to him that I was never jealous of anyone but really felt jealous of him. By way of explanation I elaborated that I envied him because not only did he have the power to do good for his country – but he also had the money with which to do it. It was the time when universal basic education was the top of the agenda. In September 1976, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme. This scheme, which was welcomed in many quarters in Nigeria, was abandoned midway in November 1979....

Lagos was totally choked. It was literally quicker to walk from place to place than to take a taxi. In one place there was a road leading up to a freeway, only when you arrived at the joining point you were several inches higher than the surface on which you were supposed to continue. I never saw more cruelty than the way one Nigerian treated its inferior. On the other hand, we were moving in the circles of the educated elite. They were all educated to much higher levels than I was. But the point was not that they had university degrees, but that they had professorships and graduate degrees from well known universities in Russia, America, England ... I knew how hard it was to go to a foreign land to gain an education – but to do so as a black man in a white society was doubly so!

I was clearly putting far more money into this venture for “raisins tomorrow” and eventually cut it. Spencer for a while was angry, threatened legal action, but eventually just faded away. Years later we read in the Jewish Chronicle that his wife had died. I have no idea what befell him. I am sorry this did not work out. It could have, in time, but the timespan was too long. I certainly do not regret the experience and most certainly not the lost funds.

Sylvia’s comment this morning was “He was awful. The only good thing that came out of him was that we got to know Trudi and Erwin Eltes”. It seems that Spencer had put an advertisement somewhere, seeking investors and

Erwin and I both responded. Sylvia's words: "Erwin was the wiser, he could see what this was about. He was a far better judge of people than you are but you had to run with it as you always have to run with things...."

Another "brush" with Africa came as a result of the chance meeting of people in the Job Clubs. Ata Aframian was a Jewish nuclear physicist who was a refugee from Iran. He had done his doctorate at Birmingham University and had an excellent command of English. As an Iranian he was not really trusted by the people in the UK nuclear industry and was never able to return to his vocation. He and Simin became our good friends and we helped them where we could. Thus it was that Ata became one of our Job Club leaders, but his hope was always to make up for some of the wealth that had been stolen in Iran from his family by means of international trade, mainly in commodities. One person who became a member of Ata's Job Club was Pascal. He was in exile from Zambia and was forced by the Department of Employment to attend or else lose his benefits. Pascal was clearly highly educated and extremely well connected in Zambia, albeit that those then in Government there would have nothing to do with him. It was his full and serious intention to return home and to bid for the Presidency of Zambia. The two gentlemen interested me in potential lucrative trade with Zambia and for a while Pascal used our home as his office and me as his sounding board on a daily basis. From there he attempted both to bring about some trade opportunities and to plan his political come-back. Sylvia and I "loaned" him his daughter's school fees. I eventually said a firm "no" when the request came for me to pay for flying lessons for his son. Needless to say, no trade opportunities ever matured. Sadly, Pascal also did not live to make the Presidency of his country. He died suddenly and quickly from liver cancer.

There were other failures too.

One was an Israeli who had an idea to produce containers for spices which immediately worked as spice mills, so that whatever the spice, you had it freshly ground. We got a spice rack full of these and I had fun. It did not last and that too just faded away.

I met at that time through my accountant a couple of men who were involved with crop spraying, using light aircraft. They needed financial support and a place from which to work – and the Paddocks had plenty of space. They also bought and sold helicopters for that purpose. Agricultural Flying Services was the next company we formed. I was hoping that my dream to have access to helicopter flying might come true. But that was not to happen. The two young men simply did not perform and we closed that operation after a relatively short time because I was unwilling to risk so much money. Already the costs of keeping pilot licences and air worthiness of the machines seemed a headache. If, on top of that, no sales targets could be met, it seemed too precarious.

I also got to know out of Israel what were basically heat pumps, later to be called Reverse Cycle Air Conditioners. In any refrigeration cycle, you pump heat from area A and dump it in Area B, relying on what in physics is known as Boyles Law: A gas, when compressed gives up heat, when expanded takes in heat. And so, in this equipment the unit can heat in winter and cool in summer simply by reversing the direction of the flow of the gas in the unit. The beauty of the equipment is that you do not use electricity to produce heat. The only use for the electricity is to pump the gas around the circuit and therefore, as a heater, it is much cheaper in use than the conventional electric heater.

Zohar was the manufacturer of this equipment. I came to an agreement with them that I would import 2 container loads of the units on condition that they would support the operation technically out of Israel and, if the worst came to the worst, they would take whatever was left over back. I

created a company called Coolheat Ltd to offer these installations.

I soon got to know what the resistance of UK architects and builders are – unbelievably conservative! We installed a few units – one in a restaurant, another in the offices of a finance company, but we got nowhere with it. Support from Israel was nonexistent. In part it was due to the reality that each young man who had served in the military had to give a further full month in every year until the age of 50. It mattered not what chaos it brought in his life. In order to sell effectively we had a very steep learning curve to go through, to understand all the technicalities involved and this simply was not forthcoming. Eventually I saw no alternative, the equipment left over was shipped back. Soon after that we learned that Zohar had gone bankrupt. Seven years later the UK saw the virtue of that equipment. Recently I installed some into White Gables, but made in Japan.

Another case, where I was several years too early, was that of replacement windows. In England you could have wooden [ mostly softwood which rotted in no time ] steel or aluminium windows. In Germany I had got to know the PVC windows and indeed had installed these throughout the house belonging to my mother. It is now almost 40 years since then – and they are still perfect! In White Gables the only windows which had deteriorated since it was built were those at the back of the garage. They had rotted. I replaced those and equipped a new sun lounge with German windows.

Well, I thought the time had come to import these windows into the UK and once the theory was proven, to set up a manufacturing plant. It did not take any capital to start with and would not have been too costly later on either. The machinery needed was mainly mitring for making the 45 degree cuts and welding. The PVC itself, of course, would be sourced outside, probably in Germany. Again, I was



seven years too early. My sample windows ended in the White Gables bathroom extension with its circular wall. One of them still has a section cut out of one corner, revealing the Aluminium strengthening inside the mouldings which distinguished it from its rivals at that time.

Another example of the “several years too early” which I had concerned Nokia. Not the cable company, but another subsidiary of the same concern was at the early stages of the production of a mobile telephone. We had so many arguments here about these. I was advocating that a mobile phone was NOT a luxury. I explained it with the simple illustration: If you take it that the average motorist does 12000 miles in a year and that his average speed is 30 mph, it means that he is 400 hours in his car, equivalent to 10 working weeks a year and is totally cut off. Ergo, a phone in the car was not a luxury but a necessity. Nothing ever came of it because I was outvoted. The reality is that even if I had tried to go for this, it would have been totally outside my league. This was not for the “little man” and small company. It took, when it began to take root, enormous concerns and investment which were way, way outside my league. Nevertheless I do feel quite satisfied at the knowledge that I did have the forethought and the vision – I knew it would happen one day....,

Clearly, my feet were itching and I was looking forward to enlarging my operation. It was in that climate that I met SR, then the Managing Director of one of my suppliers, through whom I made a number of enquiries concerning supplies for Cables and Flexibles and who had, indeed, secured us cost free stock from his employers which was a big help. He was an overweight individual with a high pitched voice and he dripped of gold. He enjoyed smoking a cigar – and was the only other person I knew who drove a Rolls Royce. I did not like those cars. They had a suspension which rose and fell parallel to the road surface and which always made me car sick. He was also Jewish, which did not make any difference to his appraisal, but is a

fact. Eventually SR came to me with the suggestion that he might join my operation because his term of contract with his existing employer was coming to an end and he wanted to continue to use his contacts in the cable field. He also spoke of us enlarging and going public on the UK stock exchange – it all sounded wonderful and was music to my ears.

I ought to explain here that as my commercial activities grew it had become obvious to me that even though I was earning well, in order to make real money one needed to sell all or part of one's shares to strangers who were willing to invest in them. I had never separated my personal money from that of the company. Also, while I loved doing what I did, I never overcame that one specific fear. It made no difference whether on any one day we had sold much or only a little – on the next day I was conscious of the fact that no orders had been received yet. So to be courted by a man who was experienced in the work of public companies and who was seriously suggesting that we would go public was very enticing.

## **LECTRIFLEX and self employment**

SR became my partner - promised a lot of money for the 50% of the shares in the existing concern [ £80,000], which never came.

Initially he worked really well. We created a company called the R & D Group [ Actually SR & David, but deliberately intended to give the impression of Research and Development ]. To the two existing cable companies we added IPS (an NSCIA approved burglar alarm installation company Intruder Protection Services) – which installed burglar alarms into domestic and commercial premises. Then came an electronic technology company (R&D Electronic Technology Ltd) working primarily in radio/telephone personal alarms for the old, infirm and those vulnerable to attack in commercial or communal life.

I readily agreed for SR to be the Chairman because he had the “gift of the gab”, while I was titled “Group Managing Director”. We hired more staff and moved the cable operation to a big rented warehouse in Greenford. My one time Sales Manager became Managing Director of Lectriflex. SR introduced regular meetings, sales targets and many other management controls which I had never bothered with but which I accepted were necessary to supervise a growing operation. If we were to go public, then we must run as a Public Company already. There was also a Computer company (Complete Computer Services), who were main agents for the Triumph-Adler computer systems.

While all this was taking place we looked for bank money which was not forthcoming - and eventually SR brought us the investors. They came in the shape of a publicly quoted company chaired by Sir FM. Another was WD, a well known solicitor, a prominent member of his synagogue. They sent a top UK accounts Co. – Peat Marwick - to look

at us and then wrote a letter that, subject to contract, they would pay £300,000 for 30% of the shares, followed by a £500,000 "loan" to complete the expansion we were planning.

I showed this to my accountant. He said it was too good to be true. They were a public company, they could not put this money into our company without the actual paper agreement because they put themselves at risk. After all, without such an agreement, SR and I could accept the money and then simply vote them off our board and keep their £300,000.

I told my accountant that I never worked like this and would not start now.

The day came when £300,000 was paid into our Company account and the shares transferred. There was NO contract to stipulate how that money was to be used.

As agreed, I started to buy stock, working on the laid down plan. The promised £500,000 loan did not follow. I was unable to pay my suppliers.

I called a board meeting. Instead of the board only the investing Chairman turned up.

"We have changed our mind - we will support Roy, but you can go – and David, you have a PERSONAL guarantee to the bank on your back, haven't you?"

There is an expression in English - "they had me by the b...s" (otherwise known as the "short and curlies"). To them £300,000 was nothing. To me it meant my house, everything we possessed. I had never separated "private" from "company", so all I could do was to sign that I relinquished all rights and they took over my guarantee to the bank - and carried on with our original plan without me.

That cost us £860,000.

What have I learned? I never again took a partner. Yes, you can always work with others, cooperate, even make legally binding agreements to outline the format of the cooperation - but always and only in separate companies which each side controls independent of the other.

It was March 1983. I was absolutely devastated. For a time I seriously considered taking my own life. I felt so utterly betrayed and for the first and only time in my life knew the meaning of the word hatred. The day it actually hit me was a Saturday. I know that because I was unable to reach the one man who might be able to help me - my accountant and absolute confidant, Gerald Kreditor. He was an orthodox Jew and nothing could happen that would break his Sabbath. The worst was looking into the eyes of my children and admitting to them how fallible I was and that I did not know what our future would bring. It was not as though I was able to fall back on our private capital – there was none. I had not separated company and personal finances... I am convinced that had it not been for Sylvia, I would indeed have both murdered SR and WD and taken my own life. It was just the time when Sylvia had become President of the Bnai Brith in UK and Ireland. The first woman in the movement to be elected to this post. Ironic this – her star was rising, I crashed at the same time. I am eternally grateful that we decided that she should continue with her BB work and see what fate would bring for me. Several of my staff suggested that they would resign their positions and I forbade it – it was enough that I was out on my ear. They were not to jeopardise their position as well. As it was, after I had left, SR called in Audrey who was responsible for the accounts department and instructed her to draw up a list of 20 staff who were loyal to me and should therefore be dismissed. When she presented him with the list he told her to add her own name to the bottom of the list and he did indeed sack them all.

It was not long thereafter that Cables and Flexibles went bankrupt, owing 20 million pounds.

In pulling back from our former lifestyle after my disaster, we had to give up other things as well. The first was the reality that while The Paddocks remained in our ownership, it was subject to a mortgage, and a major part of the repayments was derived from the rent received from R&D. Clearly the company was not staying there – there was no way my ex-partners would hand me any money. We had other tenants on the site as well – there was a company doing research utilising sea waves to convert their energy to electricity. It had been run by Peter Rispoli to whose funeral I had to go some time earlier after he was killed in a motorcycle accident. The company was still run by Peter's widow, but its future was doubtful. There was another company run by an ex-South African who supplied all sorts of travel accessories as seen at every airport nowadays. They too were not likely to continue at The Paddocks because they were growing too fast for the accommodation available there. There was David Woodstra with his Ace Graphics, creating the graphics for printing. Then we had the stables – but the rent income from them too, while welcome, was most unreliable. In fact I was owed £5000 by the woman who was supposed to oversee the letting at the time when she absconded. I never really minded the money side of this – to me it was “an extra” rather than a source of income and I loved watching the horse riders who gave such a rural atmosphere to our little industrial enclave. I hated being a landlord. I always had. The only substantial rent had come from the company I owned, and now I no longer owned it. There was something else. I had always harboured the wish to develop housing on The Paddocks, and thus make a fortune from these three acres. That was thwarted when I was told in no uncertain terms by the planning department of the London Borough of Barnet that as this was an area designated “green belt” there was no hope of development. It mattered not that there were already two private dwellings on the site which were

adjacent to us. There was nothing for it, we had to sell The Paddocks. Not many months later we learned that John Laing, the housing builders, had got permission to put up, I think, 16 houses on the site. As so often, I could only wonder at how they managed to get that permission....

Another casualty was my directorship in "Real Estates". Some years earlier our accountant Gary Cole came up with a proposal that for a relatively small amount of money I might like to finance the attempts of a young man to enter the real estate business. I did this with pleasure knowing that Gary would see to their bookkeeping and that I would be a sleeping partner – derive some fees from the business but not be involved with the day-to-day running of it. I had fun creating the name for the new firm, calling it just what it was – "Real Estates" rather than the individual's personal names which so often were used for similar businesses. The logo became /\ to denote two roofs. Now that I had suffered the defeat at R&D Gary made it very clear – he wanted me out of the Real Estate business. I resigned without an argument. There was no point in trying to hold on to something in which others did not want me. All I actually got from them was my initial investment, irrespective of the fact that it ought to have grown somewhat....

Another such "bit of fun investment" which came our way via Gary was a firm who were manufacturing rather nice men's suits in the north of England. It was a pleasure to drive up there, be greeted as a Director/Investor, and to be measured for really good quality suits. The reality of life was however that with the competition from across the world they never stood a chance. Without doubt I had been a "soft touch" but equally without doubt, I did not mind and enjoyed it.

Now, with 25 years hindsight I still smart at the insult which we endured, to be swindled so by someone I took in and trusted. But in truth, I must say that "Me'az ya'tza Mattok".

This is a biblical reference from the story of Samson in the book of Judges (14) in which a swarm of bees built their hive in the carcass of a lion who has threatened Samson and which in the Hebrew is used to illustrate how from adversity something good emerges. Without any doubt the life which we built after the commercial disaster which had befallen me was good and rewarding. I do not know many people who at the end of their working life are still doing what they had started with at the beginning of their working career. I was privileged and there is no doubt that what followed was totally fulfilling. But there is another thought at the back of my mind. I am not at all certain that had the betrayal not happened, I would not have lost the company in the end anyway. There is no doubt in my mind that I had been running Lectriflex in what can only be described as an instinctive or amateurish way. There was never any forward planning, there was no wish to create forecasts and controls, no attempt at ensuring that we had a stable vehicle. I had found a niche market, and grasped at the opportunity which I instinctively knew was there. But others saw the success and realised that the idea was good and began to copy it. We in fact spawned our own competition notably by having members of our staff starting parallel and competing companies. I do not know that they were "stronger" than I was, but without doubt the slices of the cake would have become thinner and it may well be that my inadequacy at commercial realities would in the end have meant that we could not have prevented our own demise. All this is, of course, pure speculation and I am only grateful that I am able to make this from a position of strength and gratitude.

We went through a very hard period for a while – and Sylvia was the rock to which I clung. For a while there was talk of legal action. I did a huge amount of research on the machinations of those who had swindled me out of the company which I had created. I still have the microfilms of literally hundreds of companies into and out of which the



individuals concerned were appointed as Directors. Other than WD and SR there was also most prominently CM. Eventually the newspapers reported that he had been killed in an aircraft accident in Africa and his body never found. There was great suspicion that this was a sham - his way of disappearing - but no one that I knew or was in touch with really cared. I also made contact with others who, like me, had been swindled by the same group of individuals, but no one who was able or willing to brave the judicial system and to bring this matter to court. His previous employers told me that they had dismissed SR but were not prepared to go public on the details for fear of the publicity which this would cause. In the end I had no choice but to accept that I had been defeated. All that was left was the memories, one drum of cable and two microfilm viewers. It is interesting that during the period when I had been shut out of my office we had a burglary. Our garage was entered after a glass pane had been broken in order to enable the intruder to get to the lock on the door. My former partners then listed several items in the garage which they falsely declared to have been company property which I was accused of stealing. That was the only time in 35 years that we had any intruders to our property. But it was certainly a nasty feeling that our privacy had been violated and without doubt I was feeling intimidated.

We were totally at a loss as to what to do. A major problem was that the bank threatened to foreclose on the company which owned The Paddocks. We had no choice other than to sell it in order to repay the loan. I had always dreamed of obtaining building permission to develop the site. There were, in any case, two small houses adjacent to our part of that land and the rest was a golf course. It was an enclave of industry in the green belt which surrounds London and I was refused permission to do anything there. It hurt considerably when shortly after we had been forced to sell The Paddocks, a large firm of property developers obtained permission and eventually built a large number of

houses on that site. Again, all we could do was to accept that that is how the world goes round....

Another problem was our children's education. All three were in a private school, with considerable costs attached. We were able to obtain assistance for those fees and Michael won a scholarship for which I am eternally grateful. The investment which we had put into our children's education was, without any doubt, the single best thing we have ever done.

There were several attempts by me at finding employment. My main problem was and I confronted it several times, that employers did not want someone who for so many years had worked for himself, had hired people to work under him – and worse – if he was that careless that he managed to lose his company, how could he expect them to trust their company to him? It seemed that I was unemployable. Those replacement PVC Windows were a possibility – but that took capital which I did not have. We turned to my father who first suggested that I start a sign-making firm as he had supported his son-in-law to create. My father could not understand that there were really sufficient car and advertising sign makers in England. His next suggestion was that we produce toilet paper! I dearly wanted to manufacture an apron held to the body with a single flexible steel wire, but could not find a source for that – so much for starting something up on my own....

One day, Gideon Kolb came to Sylvia's office in Hillel House, the headquarters of the UK Bnai Brith movement and explained that he was an artist. He had painted a painting of Werner Lash the former BB President who had died and he wanted to donate this picture to the movement. We went to view it and in due course there was to be a small ceremony of handing over that picture. During the reception he asked me what I did as one does when conducting small talk. I do not know what it was that guided me on that occasion. Somehow, for the first time, I

wanted to tell it as it was and not hide my shame of being unemployed. As I was narrating the events I could see tears welling up in his eyes. It transpired that he at an earlier time in his life had gone through the self same experience and my story had brought those memories flooding back into his consciousness. "You are coming with me in the morning" he said "we are going to fix this".

We travelled by bus down to Shepherds Bush where the offices of the Film Artists Association was. It was a Trades Union which represented those in the acting world who were appearing as extras in the film industry. The General Secretary was there and saw us. He explained that there were no vacancies... I cannot remember the exact conversation. Vaguely I seem to remember that I had been asked to leave the room and as I left I heard Kolb say "this man IS getting a card!". The upshot was that indeed I did. I was suddenly and for the first (and only) time in my life, a Trade Union member.

I have always equated the system to what I have seen of men seeking employment in films to the great depression of the 1930's. These are always scenes of a factory gate with a lot of men hanging about outside. A foreman arrives at that gate and points "you, you and you, the rest of you, go home!"

That was precisely how it was for the film extras, only instead of having to go to the factory door I had to telephone the central desk several times each day to be told whether or not I had a job the following day. By great irony the very first occasion on which I was given a role happened to be in a non-descript "Z-rated" movie called the "Good and the Bad in Sport" which was being filmed that week in no other place than the cricket club in Totteridge! It happened to be in the week before Danielle's bat mitzvah so Sylvia was left to do the jobs which I would otherwise have done at home to prepare for that but I could not let the

opportunity go. Other occasions followed, but never again as conveniently situated as that first one!

The world of film making is a long series of tedium. As an extra you are the lowest of the low. You have to endure very many hours of hanging around, you “act” for only very short durations and virtually never utter a word. If you are given a line to speak then you are indeed privileged and rewarded with extra pay. Pay was, indeed, good! It felt wonderful when I received my first pay packet – an envelope with cash in it and was able to take that home with me. I no longer remember the names of the films I was in and only one with a bit more detail – I was dressed as a Roman, we were on a set made to look like Rome. Sometime later a woman in the synagogue said she thought that she recognized me and seems to have seen me in that film. I never became a star, no one ever asked for my autograph. [ can one put a “smiley” into a narrative in a book??? ]. I kept up my membership of the Union for several years after I ceased applying for acting jobs. I really felt I owed it to them to support them with this membership fee. Really it was this act of compassion by Gideon Kolb and the time when I worked as a film extra which started my healing.

When one is job hunting one needs to collate all one’s previous experience and to see where one might fit in naturally or logically. I realised that I would never fit into this world of acting – certainly not at the “extras” level. For a few minutes I toyed with the idea whether the one distinguishing feature I had might be used to get an active speaking slot – I mean my accent – but that was only fleeting. That question of “Where do you come from?” the moment I opened my mouth and uttered even only a single word has always haunted me and it was totally unlikely that I could now use it to my advantage. The fact was that I simply did not fit into the indignity and life of a film extra and was going to do all I could to get out of it. It was therefore that I made contact again with Pearson Panke

and they generously offered me a post in their firm despite having asked me at the interview that very question which I have already spoken of here – if I managed to lose my own company, why should they entrust me with theirs? It did not last for long. I did not like working there any more than I had done the first time round. One of my tasks was to bring about the manufacture of a Robotic Arm which they had designed to serve as a replacement for the human operator and to perform the automatic feeding components on to the bed of a press. Nevertheless I always felt inferior to the incumbents at PP. I was not given any meaningful responsibility of my own and continued to seek whatever else fate might bring my way.

I had a succession of small jobs which I grasped.

Steve Newman whom, we knew from his activities as a Vice President of Bnai Brith, introduced me to his uncle who had invented a means of preserving branches of pine by immersing them in a solution containing turpentine or something similar. From these he made quite authentic looking artificial everlasting Bonsai plants. I was asked whether I might be able to sell these and tried it for a while. I did so with some, but not enough success. One of my customers was the Pinks flower shop up the road from where we live. Eventually I realised that these were neither everlasting nor particularly good in a dusty atmosphere. It was certainly fun while it lasted!

I no longer remember how it came about, I think it was via Sylvia's office at Bnai Brith Hillel House, but I was asked to step into the shoes of someone who was acting as a German technical interpreter for Jaguar cars. They were sending a large lorry with a Jaguar XJ-12 to Northern Germany. It travelled from centre to centre and its purpose was to teach the local dealerships and maintenance workshops the intricacies of their new air-conditioning system. The Mechanic-Instructor for whom I was translating had no German and it was my task to do the

verbal communicating. If you think of it, it was ludicrous to have both of us on that trip. By the third stop I knew all the details and could field the questions and answers without having to ask the Jaguar Man and so the rest of that trip he tended to have a cushy life. Jaguar even sent me a certificate to confirm what I had achieved – but it fizzled out. After a couple of these trips I was not called again....

That job sparked the thought that I might indeed use the languages I had and for a short while I worked as a technical translator from German to English of technical and engineering documents.

It was a reminder of a position I had held many years earlier while still a student of engineering when one summer holiday job I had was in an office in Fleet Street as a technical writer. These are a very special breed of writers who put on paper what the design engineer has created and explain to the reader the advantages of the product or the details necessary for the servicing of it. At that time I remember I wrote an article about a then new invention – tapes with electrical conductors in them, wound around a road tanker which, when electricity was passed through them, heated up and transferred their heat to the material in the container – in that case chocolate. Molten chocolate was poured into those tankers and pumped out again at the end of their journey. [ Why they were not allowed to cool down, solidify and heated up again at the end of such a journey defeats me!] Anyway, I attempted to offer my services now as technical translator. I must have been very unsuccessful in this because I do not recall a single translating job which I actually carried out!!

A little more successful, but again for only a very short duration, was a marketing survey and consultancy which I carried out for a Norwegian Heating System manufacturer - specialist dental computerised products which they were trying to sell in the UK, as well as a Cad/Cam system for use in the oil industry. I remember offering the equipment

to the dental industry here and a trip up to Aberdeen – but the fact remains, it was again a very short period of time only and disappeared into the sands. It was at that time that I had come to the conclusion that England had a typical Arab economy. It produced a great deal of oil and besides that there was only sand. It was horrifying to see how UK manufacturing was vanishing and whatever was needed here was imported from overseas.

Then I landed a job which I really enjoyed. An acquaintance of ours was lecturing at evening classes at the Hendon College of Technology and gave me the opportunity to give a series of evening classes in basic computing. The class was populated by grandparents who all wanted to understand or to know what their grandchildren were doing on these machines. My main success lay not in imparting the intricacies of the use of a spreadsheet, but at taking away the fear of the use of the machine and explaining how they could find an answer when a specific question arose. The saving and retrieving of information was another problem – and so I explained that all the computer was, was a simple filing cabinet, with different drawers and each file labelled and sorted either alphabetically or by date... A teacher always knows how successful he is by the fact that he himself has enjoyed the class. If he does, then his students absorbed what he was imparting – and I loved that job. But it, too, did not last. Hendon College changed its policy, they ceased employing part-time staff and with that after a couple of terms my contract was not renewed.

A Bnai Brith friend of ours, Maurice Futerman, is an electronics engineer and was running a small manufacturing company out of Radlett. He needed help and I had plenty of time on my hands. I offered my help and he readily accepted it. I knew nothing of the electrical/electronics involved but was able to apply my hands at the practical and assembly things. At first it was to help him finish assembling a big control tower – an order

he had for the National Theatre. Many days of connecting wires and creating a wiring loom were eventually a total waste of time. He was to close those premises down before too long, as his activities never paid for his outlay. He was then asked by the National Theatre to install a computer network in their building connecting every single office - an absolutely immense job. The problem was that this could not be done during the day when the offices were occupied by staff. So it was at nights that we laboured away laying cable ducting in the basements and above ceilings, pulling miles of cable through inaccessible ducts and crevices, fitting plastic trunking to the walls in every office [ that is when I learned the word "Dado"] and fitting all the various sockets for both power and communication circuits into these. When the staff returned to work in the morning we had to be gone, like the elves in that shoemaker story... It was a full year which I spent with Maurice. I absolutely loved it and liked him too. There was only one problem - there was never any pay throughout that time. Maurice is such a nice guy. Without question I worked with him because I had offered to help and not because he asked me to or employed me as such - but I did feel that he took more than was fair. Nevertheless, we meet from time to time at BB, have dinners together occasionally and there is no bitterness between us at all - but I do wonder how he sees all this.

Sylvia was doing a great job at BB. Against much initial opposition from some bigoted individuals who had not wanted to see a young woman at the helm of the movement, she had started imprinting her own style on its activities and bringing some innovation and care for its own membership into its activities. Notably among these were the Jewish Music Festival and the support for the unemployed who were suffering from the recession which had taken grip in the early 1980's. Initially she meant this to be support given to Jewish unemployed. It was then that she learned from one of our Bnai Brith sisters that the Department of Employment was creating Job Clubs. She



called a meeting to which she had invited the leading Jewish organisations which would likely be interested in such work. As so often happens they all agreed that something needs to be done by someone, as long as that someone was someone else. Sylvia agreed – I guess decided – that she should look into this as none of the others volunteered to do so. Sylvia asked for a meeting with the Employment Service. She learned that the UK Government through its Department of Employment were paying for schemes being run by private enterprise to support the long term unemployed and to train them in how they can deal with the realities which they were facing. They were eager to let BB run such a scheme in Golders Green, but on the proviso that it was open to all, not just for Jews. We hired a church hall there, to be used each morning, but had to clear the space each day, because the hall was being used by others as well. I built a trolley on which we stacked all the newspapers, likewise all the other equipment could be wheeled away – and each morning Sylvia would go to work.

Bnai Brith International, to which the UK was affiliated, had its headquarters in Washington and every now and again Sylvia had to travel there. So it was that I volunteered to stand in for her at the Job Club while she was away. When she returned at the end of a week, I really did not want to give that post up. Apart from the Sundays' Hebrew teaching that I had done prior to us getting married, this was the nearest I had ever been to teaching and I loved it. I really felt – and knew – that I was in the right job and that I had something to contribute to total strangers and to help them in sorting themselves out in a dreadful situation which I had come to know only too well. And so it was that we started to expand the Job Club activities in the name of Bnai Brith.

Job Clubs were, in fact, run after obtaining a contract from the Department of Employment. The first one was “granted” to Bnai Brith, but thereafter it became a process

of submitting closed bids for the right to such a location and in competition with others who also were involved in people training. So, while it was Government money which funded the schemes, we remained entirely separate from the Government. That was an important factor in the way the Clubs were operated and vital that it was made clear to those who came to attend.

Only unemployed who were out of work for longer than 6 months were entitled to participate. Initially this was at the request of the unemployed person, but soon it was turned into coercion and under pressure from the civil servants who were the bidders of Government policy. The very fact that it became compulsory to attend, under the threat of losing one's benefits – made it vital that those who came to our clubs understood and believed that we were there to help those who wanted to be helped and that we were not part of that Civil Service which was applying the pressure on them.

Once in every three weeks a group of 10 – 20 people arrived at the Job Club. Being unemployed for at least 6 months was the only thing that they had in common. Beyond that they came from all walks of life and with the entire possible range of education. We were open for mornings only and for the first two weeks, it was our task to take them through a theoretical course which discussed all aspects of how do you go about securing a job in the prevailing economic situation. This included CV creation, telephone and interview techniques, speculative approaches, letter writing and filling in of application forms. After that initial course rooms were available where newspapers, reference books, computers, telephones and writing materials were available, so that they had an "office in which they worked at the job of finding work". Initially we were working single handed at such a location. It was only later on in that 8 – 9 year period that the Department of Employment made funds available for an assistant to the Job Club leader who until then had the group in the theory

sessions as well as up to 30 or so “older members” using the facilities and resources on offer. Typical of Government – it did not really care, as long as it was meeting its own targets. We were never really asked whether we were suitable for the position, we simply dived in at the deep end of the pool. True, we were given supplies of an extremely well thought out book of which each member received a copy and which covered the course which we followed. As in all teaching, you have to go beyond the printed word in the literature. You have to motivate the individuals to want to succeed and you had to understand what was keeping them from success. Often we first had to deal with the obstacles which they faced and often it was not possible to overcome these. Chief among the obstacles was the huge problem of the poverty trap.

An unemployed person received at that time not only the small amount on which to feed himself and his family, but often also received the rent he had to pay for his housing and if he needed medication he was included in those groups which are exempt from paying (a contribution) for medication. I had been a beneficiary of that system for a while. I stood in line every fortnight to show that I still existed and to confirm that I was seeking employment. We had become exempt from paying the local authority rates and received medication for free. All this ended when I brought the first money home from the film company for which I was working as an “extra”. I therefore understood the impossibility of accepting a job, mostly a low paid job, at the moment when one had accepted one’s position, while my initial pay or salary would not arrive until the end of a week – or even month. Often the earning capacity of the unemployed who landed a job simply did not cover his basic outgoings – especially not the rents for those who did not live in dwellings which they owned. These people were trapped. If they owned up to having found a job their support vanished from one minute to the next. If they did not own up to that job, they were deemed defrauding the state. Worse was the fact that to get back to receiving

housing benefit was a long drawn out and difficult process because local authorities did everything they could to wriggle out of these payments and if, after your trial period at a new job, the position was not continued, you were in really deep trouble. No amount of arguing with the Civil Service – or with Government – ever did anything to alleviate the problem which they had created and to my knowledge there is still no solution to this. It is part of the myth that those unemployed do not want to work. It is malicious to assert this! Another iniquitous part of the system was that no one at the Employment Service cared whether we were trained or suitable for the task which we were carrying out. Only after I had already been in the job for a considerable period did they invent a “days’ training”- but that was not only disruptive to my work schedule, it was also lamentable in its quality and was applied with the usual governmental coercion – I had to attend under penalty of ....

One of the most fascinating aspects of running these training sessions was the way individuals of totally different educational and social standing jelled with each other. University professors and street cleaners would come together and help each other. They would look out for job opportunities for others in the group, pass on any suggestions which they had heard, friendships were formed. Equally interesting was the fact that once someone had actually found a job and left the Job Club, they, with very few exceptions, never returned. It was as if they wanted to put that period behind themselves.

We put a great deal of emphasis on speculative job hunting. If they could come up with a company into which logically they might fit, they would make an approach. One particularly memorable such “application” of the speculative was the story of Derek. He was a cabinet maker and came to me one morning asking me to set up an interview with a furniture company who had advertised an opening. He was jumping up and down with excitement and it was my task to

make that call rather than him doing it himself. I started dialling the number, when a thought hit me and I put the phone down again. Instead of the phone call I asked Derek to write them a “speculative” letter. In that he explained that he was a skilled cabinet maker who had recently moved to the area, that he was familiar with their products because as part of his training course in furniture making he had actually drawn and then built a copy of their chair catalogue number xyz. Could he please be told who it was that was responsible for hiring staff and could he please come and see them.

Derek was called for an interview and one of the first things that he was told was that it was funny that he should be writing to them just then because in fact they had just put an advertisement out for such a job. We had discussed this before he went there and cool as a cucumber he was able to respond with a surprised “really?” Well, Derek got that job mainly because he had demonstrated that he really wanted to work for that firm and was not just one of the many who answered the advertisement and paraded themselves before the interviewing panel. Logically Derek fitted in there.

It may be argued that this was dishonest subterfuge. Well, I admit it was – but it was a typical example of a situation where I feel that the ends justified the means. Another example was a success of Sylvia’s. She had a disabled woman at her Job Club who had never worked. When Sylvia saw the CV which that young woman was using she noticed that under “health” it reported that she had leg irons because she had had polio in the past. She had taken every course under the sun and was an exceptionally capable individual and clearly prospective employers shied away because of the health problems. Henceforth health was no longer mentioned on her CV and very soon afterwards she actually landed long term employment. Other members reduced the level of admitted qualification

because they kept being passed over by being “over qualified”.

Another important lesson which had to be imparted to our Job Club members was to accept that when they were working on the telephone, they might get some very rude retorts from individuals who were fed up with what has come to be known as “cold calling”. I had come to learn this firstly when selling my electrical cables over the telephone and, even more so, when calling embassies to get them to advertise in the Diplomatic Yearbook, one of the fairly lucrative but sole destroying jobs I took following my downfall in R & D. I explained to our members that they had to accept that some people are rude. I knew only too well the fear of making the next phone call after having been berated during an earlier one. The feeling of “I cannot go on” comes over you, in case the next call will be as nasty as the previous one. So – my argument became that if a person is rude, then it is his problem. He has to live with himself for the rest of his life. You – the caller – will never meet him. If you passed him in the street or sat next to him on the bus, you would not know him. So accept that it is the other who is rude and put aside the fear. Of course it helps if you believe in the product which you are selling, and in the Job Club case it was yourself – and self confidence is a necessary commodity in the job market. In many cases this really worked and I was pleased to see how the members put this into practice, just as I had learned to do in the past.

We bid for more and more of the contracts and ended up working at 9 locations with 15 staff. Bidding for a new contract was always difficult. The details which had to be submitted were prescribed by the Employment Service – and had no space for any profit to be made. It meant that all other figures which we submitted had to be inflated a little in order to generate a profit. After all, the staff and we wanted a salary and the taxman his pound of flesh but the amount by which we inflated the budget could never be

such that they could doubt the amount we had put in or argue that it was too much. We were so successful because we had gained a good reputation for the results which we were generating, to the point when we were actually at one time named as the excelling Job Club.

Some time into that 8½ year period the Employment Service changed its rules – mid contract and without consent. They brought in what they called “Payment by Result”. Henceforth we were to receive monthly only 75% of the contracted monthly payment and the rest we would get as a bonus for proven job successes. We were to get £100 for each job proven. It mattered not that we were unable to go to our landlords and say “sorry, we can only pay 75% of the agreed rent”. It started a relentless hunt for proof. Often we would have to call employers in order to verify that a member had started work there. Worse – we needed to get that in writing, we needed a signature. As it turned out we were again very successful at this, partly because of our relationship with the members and partly because of my tenacity. I would not give up on these searches. In the end we were earning with these bonuses considerably more than the original contract had stipulated, which was not at all what the employment service had aimed at with its new measures. They needed to reduce their costs. But this was also the beginning of the decline in our relationship with the Employment Service.

One instance was their demand – put into new contracts – that Job Club leaders were duty bound to report members whom they suspected of transgressing the regulations governing the unemployed. It was to me the most glaring example of a fascist state. I wrote to our Member of Parliament and protested. He took that up with the relevant Minister who responded with the argument that it had nothing to do with Government. He had sent my letter to the Employment Service – a Quango set up by Government – who had responded that if we did not like these clauses we could desist from applying for contracts.

The UK Government was openly agreeing with a behaviour which we came to learn to be part of a dictatorship! We did, of course, continue to apply for contracts, but I instructed our staff that they were NOT to report anyone. In fact it would be dangerous for them to do so. They were confidants of the unemployed and if they ratted on these not only would it betray that necessary confidence but worse, it would be obvious whence the Employment Service had received its information and thus their lives would be endangered.

By that time the Company running the Job Clubs was no longer Bnai Brith. The leaders of the movement had come up with the argument that making a profit from the Job Clubs could be seen as running contrary to the rules governing the running of a charity and therefore asked us to buy the Job Clubs from Bnai Brith and run them independently of the movement. It riled me to pay £10,000 to the movement which had done precisely nothing towards the creation or running of the Job Clubs and was left entirely to us to do alone but Sylvia agreed that as we had used their name we ought to pay up. And so it was. Our own private company then ran these projects. An amusing story of how the Bnai Brith name was being used by the non-Jewish population and proved that we actively promoted the name of the movement, came from David Stern, an ex-President of BB. David was a magistrate and reported one day a young man who had come before him on some misdemeanour. During the examination of the accused his state of being unemployed was being discussed and David asked him what he was doing to get out of trouble. "I am a member of the Bnai Brith Job Club" came the explanation – from a man who could not have any idea of David's standing in that movement.

One day we were visited by inspection staff of the Employment Service. It turned out that they had been seconded from the Treasury to claw back from the Job Club operators £2,000,000. We were accused of falsifying



our successes and defrauding (!) the service by overpaying the travel claims of members to attend the Job Club. Not only that, we were not adhering to the rule that they could only be 6 months in the Club and were then not entitled to these fares. We were to repay an inordinate amount to the Service from the money already paid to us. Not only that, but we were to cease operating virtually forthwith. We - who had been the blue eyed wonders of the providers and singled out for praise, were suddenly the villains. We ran to Gerald Kreditor, our loved and trusted accountant and wise father figure. He advised us to see a lawyer, but it had to be one of the top city lawyers and named one possible. That man, when he heard our story explained that he could not represent us. He had just heard precisely the same story from his mother-in-law who happened to be another provider hounded by the Treasury team. It transpired that everyone was in the same boat.

We ended up with another lawyer in a firm known to be left-wing inclined, who represented us. We had to gather the evidence and prepare it for him in order to reduce the astronomical legal costs and he wrote to the Department. Weeks went by, we heard nothing. It turned out that he had cut their demands to shreds and shown that they had no leg to stand on. Not only that, but he also showed that under the terms of the contract they were duty bound to give us notice of closure and therefore still owed us several months of payments. It was a rare forethought – maybe luck – on my part that I had concluded 9 rental agreements with landlords which included a clause which said that while we were prepared to give 6 months' notice of the termination of a lease, we were to be released from the contract in the event of the Government withdrawing the funding for the running of the Job Club. So we were able to pass some of the losses on to those poor landlords and had to dismiss our dearly loved staff. We were advised by the lawyer that we should take the matter to a Judicial Review, as we had a good chance of winning that – though no guarantee. I knew that Judicial Reviews were

often conducted by cronies of Government. I also knew that even if we won, we would never again get a contract from the department as long as that same staff was still there and so I decided to cut our losses and walk away. It was very sad, but there was really nothing that we could do against the iniquity and duplicity of the so-called Civil Service.

In the period of time in which we were running the Job Clubs, a remarkable change took place in the way communication was organised in the UK. Traditionally the Post Office had dealt with it all and at some time earlier the telephony side of its business was separated from the letter and parcel post. All voice and signal messages going via cables were put into a telephone company. The fibre optics revolution had started. Here, instead of using the traditional copper wire to conduct the sound signals, fibres of glass were now used. Its huge advantage was in the fact that there is so much less resistance to light waves travelling in glass compared with electrical waves travelling in copper. It meant that a huge number of different waves could be bundled into a single ray of light – in other words many more messages could travel simultaneously down one cable as compared with the traditional copper wire. Fibre optics had started to become available during my time in the cable industry but I had decided not to add these to our Lectriflex or R&D portfolio. The reason for this was the difficulty in joining and the problems occurring at terminations. In copper wires you simply solder or clamp two wires together to make a good connection. Equally you can tighten a screw on the end of the wire to terminate it on a connecting rail or a plug & socket. The fibre optics wires were not only very fragile – as glass is – but also you had to be exceedingly accurate to get to wire ends exactly in line with each other. The first fibre optic cables were laid where there were very long runs with no connections – across the ocean beds and along railway lines. I always said that I was not prepared to sell such wires as long as I would have to send in an engineer with a microscope to somewhere where there was a problem of connection.

This has, of course, radically changed by now and we see fibre optic cables arriving at each house carrying signals from commercial TV and communication companies. Everywhere except Totteridge Lane, that is, because here the housing density is so low, it is still not worth their while to tout for our business. The reason I go into all this detail is to explain that the next part of breaking up the nationalised communications industry was to take away the monopoly which the telephone company had over the transmission of sound and data. For the first time in history private companies were allowed to compete for the telephone business and it started initially with international phone calls. When I learned of this I obtained for myself the agency of one such company – Econophone. I sold access to their telephone exchange and was paid a commission for all phone calls made by the people whom I introduced. The clients were given certain additional digits and a password number to dial before the actual phone number and were thus diverted from the traditional telephone company to a privately owned one. This was a great way to earn some money. I had no investment other than my time and phone calls. Bit by bit this traffic increased. We all like to get something for less – and phone calls, especially those abroad, were traditionally expensive. I well remember the times when we had to call the exchange and arrange a particular time when a call would be put through by the operator – a time when owning a phone line in a private household was still something special and when often we had to share telephone lines. Here now we got cheap overseas calls! I relied heavily on one satisfied client telling their friends and many of my clients were overseas students studying in England. They tended to also have email [also in its infancy at that stage] and were easy to communicate with. Above all I was able to build up a small business with no employees, no responsibilities and no ties. Eventually Econophone went bankrupt and for a while I transferred to the selling of the identical services on behalf of another such Company – Onetel. All this had started while we were running the Job

Clubs and it was this to which I devoted myself more fully after the Employment Service closed down our operation. This time – commercially – I had no problem as far as income was concerned when they pulled the rug from under our feet. To increase our business I offered a £5 reward for each new client someone introduced, payable once that new client had paid their first telephone bill for at least £10. That worked like a treat! It was almost amusing to see how pleased people were to get these £5 cheques arriving in an envelope. It was not a lot of money, but it said “thank you”. Only its administration took a long time, but time was my own and I certainly did not mind.

While the phone calls business was lucrative and easy, it was also boring. I used to say that it was “like selling underpants – they are all the same”. More and more competition was started. I was hitting arguments like “the others are cheaper” and had no way of justifying why mine were not. I was after all just an independent salesman. I had no contract or tie to the company and had absolutely no input in the management of the company. Eventually I gave up and ceased selling these telephone services. Commission payments began to dwindle as the customers ceased using the service – it just disappeared into the sands, so to speak. Many competing services grew – and I was retired.

## 1989 – Genealogy

There is an old joke running in our family: When does Life begin? The Catholic says: “at conception”. The Protestant says: “no, at birth”, while the Jew says they are both wrong, it is when the children have left home and the dog has died. I am about to find out.... Yesterday we put Doggy to sleep. He was 12 ½. We had him – and he had us – for 11 years and it was time for him to go. He leaves a huge gap in our lives and I cannot imagine that life will now start. It will only start without him... I bring this thought in here only because I have just used that word, “retirement”. To me retirement was the time when you ceased earning your living and you were able finally to do all the things you wanted to do rather than those you HAD to do. I started on my genealogical researches in earnest. I grew up with virtually no knowledge of whence I came other than the very narrow family which I had known. I cannot pretend that I was interested in anything else but as I grew older this began to change. I had been struck by the thought that it was so wrong not to know our roots. I wanted to be able to show that with all the destruction of World War 2, the one thing that the Nazis had failed to do was to destroy our knowledge. Yes, it would take a lot of time and effort, but we COULD piece it back together. My father never spoke with me about his family. I never knew anything about his parents, almost nothing about his siblings except for the Blum family in Tel Zvi near Pardes Hanna with whom we had contact and on whose farm I was from time to time as a child. Erna Blum was my father's oldest sister, 12 years his senior. It was to her house in Danzig that Aba was sent in the 1914-1918 war at the end of which Germany had lost its hold over West Prussia and Golub became part of Poland. He was about 8 when he was sent to Danzig and as far as I know, never saw his parents again. I knew that there was a great deal of anger among the surviving siblings because they had failed to save their sister Meta from the Nazis – but I never

learned the details of this. I had from time to time also asked Ima about her background. Her response was always “what does it matter, no one really cares” One day in late February 1989, she actually responded. We sat down and she dictated what she remembered. Names and relationships went into a file in my computer – a bit like the definition of that word “Lecture” – a set of notes passing from in front of the teacher to in front of the student, without going through the head of either. That Sunday afternoon I had to go to Germany on business. When I returned from that trip, it was 11pm, the telephone was ringing, totally unusual for that time of night. I answered the call. It was someone from Edgware hospital to tell me that Ima had been admitted, would I come quickly. I never spoke to her again. Some time later I was in New York at Central Station. It had become my habit to open telephone books and check up whether by any chance a KOEBNER was to be found in it. Here, for once, there was one: Linda. I called, we met. I had found my second cousin of whom I knew nothing – except only that Linda’s father was one of the individuals whom Ima had spoken about in that conversation 10 days before she died. Linda was divorced from her husband and had reverted to her maiden name – otherwise I would never have found her. It was in this way that I started my genealogical researches. I used to joke and explain that I had made the mistake of starting with 8 grandparents and attempted simultaneously to research both Sylvia’s and my own background. Luckily for me the computer had by then become a “normal” household article and the internet had ceased to be the ownership of academia only. I remember so well the anger expressed by the academics, how commercialism was destroying their way of communicating with each other. In a way they were right. But it is a blessing that this latter day wonder of the world has come about. I owe an immense and immeasurable amount to the existence of that internet. To me the internet is the most wonderful way of ensuring that if, God forbid, I am

ever incapacitated and stuck at home, I will have a window into the world.

I had a huge start from a familiar but totally unknown source. In my home with Ima we always had a picture on the wall which, like so many pictures, we knew was there, but we had never really looked at it. It was a piece of Hebrew calligraphy, written on parchment, just as a Torah is written.

It was in about 1985 that I really looked at this picture for the first time and tried to decipher what it says. While it is in Hebrew, it is written without punctuation, there are many names transliterated from the German and all in all was not easy for me to decipher.

I discovered that it was an old "Yichus Brief" [ Yiddish for family tree, literally a "letter of relationships"] written in 1840 by Rabbi Aharon MIRELS - his genealogy - and given on her wedding day to his daughter Dina Dvorah. He did likewise to the other children and at least one of his sons continued that tradition. It was that which not only started my research, but also made me seek the other handed-down trees, some of which I eventually found. That is why, on one part of my mother's tree, I am able to go back to about 1300. It started my quest.





the learning of Judaism into our way of life I have directly contributed to the dilution of our tradition and with it deprived my children of a hugely important asset. I do not wish them to be observant – after all, I am not – but I do wish they knew more than I do about the many thousands of years of learning, mental exercise, ethics and law which both my and Sylvia's great grandfathers knew and lived. The vast literature that exists in the Jewish tradition is lost to us. Our children have "married out". It is such an evocative phrase. We love their partners dearly. We can really say that we accept them as our own. We have not the slightest objection to their choices and always said – and meant – that the right partner is far more important than their right religion. But yet I fear that we have also not equipped our children with the wherewithal needed to retain that which is wise and good and true in those traditions and therefore Judaism will most probably die out. Yes – they know it exists, they come with us to the Synagogue at High Holidays and we have Seder together as a family, But this veneer is so thin and that I regret. We, the Jews who were always kept as the outsiders by the nations amongst whom we lived, are contributing to our own demise, merely by shutting out the learning of the traditions.

Now back to Genealogy! I had a huge advantage in that I had the computer and access to the internet. With these not only was I able to record all the data I gathered, but also make contact with unknown people all over the world and so, bit by bit to add others to whom I was related. What a thrill it was to realise that "out there", there were quite a number of human beings who had genetic similarity to me - because we stemmed from the same roots. The secret was to collect not only the bare facts of dates and places of birth, marriage and death - but to add some biographical material and photos, which put some flesh onto the bare bones I was collecting.

Immediately a history and a geography began to emerge. Even more amazing was the realisation that these searches could help others - not merely with boring information, but with the thrill of searching for and sometimes finding, family members.

Thus began an all absorbing hobby which soon brought the discovery of the marvels of the internet in general and the superb Jewish Genealogy Society out there called Jewishgen. From this also stemmed the family reunions which we instigated – the Merzbach reunion in 2008 and the Stein reunion hopefully in June 2010.

I became very involved and read many of the dozens of messages which streamed to my computer daily.

Then, one day, a message came which hooked me. It read: "Will someone please help me find my mother?"

*Date: Sat, 27 Jan 1996 21:42:52 -0500*

*Sender: Jewish Genealogy Discussion Group*

*JEWISHGEN@MAIL.EWORLD.COM*

*From: BDurkin610 [bdurkin610@aol.com](mailto:bdurkin610@aol.com)*

*Subject: Help me find my mother!*

*I am searching for my mother. We came to this country in 1950 from Munich Germany. They put us in Huntington West Virginia. My mother did not like this country and returned to Germany about 2 to 3 months later leaving me with my father. He died in 1956 without telling me anything. I know she might be dead but it would put my mind to rest if I just knew what happened. The Red Cross has been looking for about a year and a half and have come up with nothing. If you could help me in any way I would be greatly endeared. No matter what I am doing , my mind is never at rest.*

*--*

*REMINDER: JewishGen Web Site URL =*

*<http://www.jewishgen.org>    -=-*

It turned out that this message was from a 49 year old American Betty Durkin who had been separated from her mother when she was 4. At that time she was told her mother was dead, but when she was 17, the first doubts began to creep in. Some time later I was able reunite the two on the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of the daughter.

Jewishgen Archives also gives my first attempts of solving this quest:

*Date: Sat, 6 Apr 1996 11:18:22 +0100  
Sender: Jewish Genealogy Discussion Group  
<JEWISHGEN@MAIL.EWORLD.COM>  
From: David Lewin <davidlewin@easynet.co.uk>  
Subject: Search for Betty's mother - KRUEGER, WAGNER, REISS (RICE)*

*I am writing to ask for your help.*

*Can you connect to KRUEGER, WAGNER, REISS (RICE) ?  
We are searching for the mother of Betty R. Durkin birth date is 6/17/46 from Philadelphia, USA.*

*We have located a birth certificate - and that has revealed the family names of 3 of her grandparents*

*The mother HANNAH (Channa, Anna) XXXXXXXX born 1925 in Neustettin, now Poland (Polish name: Szczezinek) East "Pommern" once part of Prussia, now in Poland.) daughter of MAX XXXXXXXX, clerk and FRIEDA, nee XXXXXXXX. She married in 1945 - presumably in a DP camp, presumably near MUNICH, Germany Mieczeslaw XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX (changed to Michael XXXXXXXX the USA) date of birth was listed as April 15, 1902 in Lemberg. His home town was Szczurowice, Poland. His father's name was Meyer and his mothers name was Bela or Bila*

*Father died in 1956 - (Betty was 12.) (possibly a former inmate of Mauthausen concentration camp???)  
The three arrived from Munich in USA with the aid of HIAS on SS General Eltinge, Arr'd US (in New York) as DPs on June 13, 1949 on community assurances (USNA)  
mother returned to Germany (about Sept/Oct 1949 to March 1950) leaving daughter aged 4 with father.  
On 9/29/50 the mother went back to Hamburg to have re-entry renewed by US Consul, but father not heard from her again. wife was hospitalized for 7 weeks and that her re-entry permit had expired. Wife wrote that she could not renew re-entry permit because at that time she was ill. Now has medical cert. to show to Consul re renewal of re-entry permit. Ours to HIAS Hamburg (copy to NY) for report and to offer assistance. File Ref.-HAN-US/Gen./LH*

*That is all we know.*

*I would be grateful for ANY lines of thought, advice, family research, alternative addresses and please - by e-mail.*

-----  
*This message was DICTATED - so were the Menu Commands!*

*I used to fumble - it was called "typing" with two fingers now my keyboard is atrophying!!*

*You too can TALK to your computer - in ANY Window based application. Ask at:*

*SPEAKEASY*

*David Lewin-Tel+44 181 4460404 Fax+44 181 4458732  
davidlewin@easynet.co.uk*

[ I can now see from this archived email that it had a footer concerning "Speakeasy". I was evidently trying at that time to create a business with voice input into the computer. I had totally forgotten about that! It was yet another example of an idea I have picked up and tried to build on, years ahead of its general acceptance. It certainly exists now, but still is not good enough for its general use. We are still

clicking away on keyboards, instead of dictating to these computers!)]

It was this search on behalf of Betty, which made me start "Search and Unite". It had opened my eyes to the enormous pain still out there 60 years on. In Search & Unite I attempt to help the many who suspect that despite the passage of so many years since World War II, someone may still exist "out there". Michael, my son, wrote a web page for it [ at that time sons knew how to do this and fathers had no clue. Since then I have learned a little and have maintained the site on my own for some years now.] - and soon all sorts of people began to make contact, including a Real Estate Company from Prague called HORREN. They explained that they knew of some real estate which had been confiscated by the former Czech Government in power in 1940 and which could revert to the former owners (or rather their heirs), only they had no idea where these people were. Could Search & Unite help??? The only facts I had were an address in 1948 and the names of two people who had died in a concentration camp.

Eventually I located the grandson of these two people, in Israel, who has now filed a claim. (the Jim story on the web pages) As soon as I handed over that address I was given three more - and later it grew and grew [ at the time of writing I am on search No 206 for them. ]

I flew to Prague as I had no idea with whom I was dealing and returned most impressed. These people clearly had made a business of it. They were researching property ownership information and trying to identify those who might have a chance to reclaim. Such people (or heirs), if found, were offered contracts to be represented in Prague. All work (including all the litigation which becomes necessary) was to be done on a contingency basis. In exchange the agreements allow for them to be paid (or

acquire) a pre-agreed percentage of the value of the property.

The combination of real estate and law is working well, because there is expert knowledge of all aspects that may arise including where necessary re-development for the purpose of increased value of assets regained.

The only real cost to people approached is the proof of identity with authenticated documentation connecting them to the people in the Czech title deeds - that is all the documentation required by the Czech courts which need to be obtained outside the Czech Republic. Acquisition of all "internal" Czech documentation is up to the Prague team.

No funds need to be sent to Prague as payment can be taken out of the proceeds of sale. The only exception to this is where a claimant decides to retain a property which was handed back. In such cases they would need to send funds to Prague. The amounts are always pre-agreed in the contracts which I have mentioned.

Personally, I derived far greater satisfaction from "hunting" for people still alive, than all those who have died and sat on the eight genealogy trees which I was researching. Another side effect is that in many cases I was able to reunite family members who had no idea about the others – simply by connecting some of those I encountered during the course of my searches.

Horren look after all matters to do with real estate and work with a Lawyer - Dr Alena Stumpfova and her daughter Martina Zikmundova - who sees to all legal matters.

The confiscation of properties were not only those of the Nazi regime but also of the Communist regime which came into power in 1948. The vast majority of these properties were formerly in Jewish hands. By dint of intermarriage often the eligible heirs are not.

Thus with the advent of the searches connected with Czech real estate a second branch grew for the Search and Unite activities. Hitherto it had been people searching for people. In the second branch it was the former homes of victims searching for the legal heirs of the dispossessed. I am not a religious person, but still, for me, each one of these searches is akin to saying Kaddish (the prayer for the dead in Judaism) for the departed.

Another chapter important in my Search and Unite life concerned the quest for answers to an enigma around the events of 1940 Vilnius. It was brought to my attention by Lani Silver and typical of me – even if I say so myself – I was again like a terrier with a bit between his teeth.

Lani Silver died in January 2009 aged 60 from a brain tumour.

I got involved with a Russian search when we visited Lani Silver one year in the USA and she explained the question marks which hang over the Soviet side of a triangle. We had befriended her years earlier when our daughters, then 10 and 7, introduced her to us in a hotel in Tiberias as "our friend, Lani". Lani was very sweet, totally disorganised and scatty. Very much into Women's Studies and the Women's Liberation Movement. I often said to her that I would agree with every word she said provided only that she changed the word "women" to "people". At that Kinneret meeting the girls and she together wrote an imaginary play and later performed it for us in the hotel room. 3-4 months later a book arrived here - hard cover, hand illustrated by her in that weird cartoony-sketching style of hers, with that play and dedicated to us. She was totally unscientific but she got hundreds of oral histories into the museum, collected by volunteers who were given training before they embarked on the interviews. It was she who spearheaded the recording on tape of the individual stories of survivors. Later Spielberg stole it from her. After the Spielberg episode she devoted herself to the foundation that brought

oral history to black kids in Alabama in memory of that poor man James Byrd Jr. who had been dragged behind a truck to his death by white supremacists. And all her life she had no money.

A typical email from her:

*Date: Mon, 3 Mar 2003 23:06:26 EST*

*Subject: Re: after you, Alphonse*

*To: davidlewin@btinternet.com*

*I am:*

- a) substitute teaching (hate it) (need another job)*
- b) teaching at a lovely School of the Arts (High School). I am teaching two courses on racism. (ends soon) (need another*
- c) family of James Byrd Jr. I coordinate a 'racism oral history*
- d) project for them. It's very exciting. I work two days a week for them.*

*My Mom and sister are very sick. I've been helping my sister raise her two kids. They're difficult. She's got multiple sclerosis...so that's all hard.*

*I've been in a songwriting class for years. I am getting better, finally.*

*Love, Lani*

She was a lovely woman and we will miss her.

It was Lani who brought Sugihara to the attention of the world and as a result of her work both he and Zwartendijk were recognized and honoured by Yad Vashem as "Righteous among the Nations" individuals.

But no one knows how it came about that the Russians permitted about 2000 mainly Orthodox Jews clad in their ritual dress to cross mother Russia and to leave it again. Stalin, with his purges and endless killings ensured that no



one of that time remained alive. So it was Lani's idea that we should try to learn from archives research what happened in reality. For this purpose we now search for the 1940 passports to analyze the Russian permits - and my corner is to search for those people or surviving families who still have those passports. "We" is Jan Zwartendijk Jr. the son of the 1940 Dutch Consul in Kaunas and Lucas Bruijn a journalist-researcher in Holland. Neither of them is Jewish, by the way.

Lani is no longer with us, her quest has not ended and I owe it to her memory to try to get an answer.

Today I see it as a duty to actively encourage members of our community to impart their memories. This combines two Mitzvot - that of showing our elders that they are still valuable and can contribute, because some people ARE still interested in them. At the same time capturing their knowledge and memories preserves insight for posterity.

How many elderly people are living in retirement and suffering from the burden of loneliness? Without some of us actively helping to record their memories, all of that background will soon be lost.

I feel that every retirement home should have a computer and genealogical software (with someone to show those willing how to use these!)

There is another side to genealogy, still in an embryonic form. Some time soon genetics will have progressed sufficiently for family relationships to be important in the field of medicine. But that is the subject of another essay.

In a questionnaire asking "why genealogy" I responded:

"I wanted to show that with all the destruction of the Second World War, the one thing the Nazis did not succeed in doing was to destroy our knowledge.

1. *What do you intend to do with the information once you have gathered it? Why?*

Essentially nothing. Leave it to posterity, in case it should become interested

2. *People who are most likely to research their family tree are aged 40+ years. Why do you think this might be?*

Because they are nearer to the day they die

3. *What do you personally 'get' from researching your ancestors? How does it make you feel?*

Satisfaction; learning; horror at the destruction of WW II

4. *Why is it so important to discover your roots?*

I feel that to give stability in life and understanding of who one is etc - nations need to know history and individuals need to know whence they came. That past is the foundation on which one builds one's life, otherwise one is in a vacuum

5. *Why does it satisfy you?*

That is very difficult to answer. Why does one like something? I guess to know that one is finding answers after putting in an effort to research something is rewarded by "satisfaction"

I really do not regret having "missed things in life" - the ONLY one is that I never learned to fly a helicopter. My "kids" gave me for my 60th birthday present an hour's lesson in one. That was so great! I had never wanted to fly fixed wing (at least not after this had been eradicated by my mother's comment about being a bus driver in the air when I was 15) - but the idea of taking off vertically, then flying horizontally and finally coming vertically down

wherever I fancied, REALLY tickled me. There was a time when I seriously considered how I might get around the civil aviation regulations and whatever other laws existed, which stopped me creating a heliport at the bottom of our garden at White Gables. After all, there were only gardens coming together down there. Ima often used to look up at the sky when an aeroplane or helicopter flew overhead and disturbed her peace and would say “my air space!” in a contemptuous way to denote her displeasure, while knowing full well that the air space was not hers at all. I soon accepted that this particular idea was totally impractical. Not only were there too many trees, especially an old, old oak with that magnificent trunk just in the corner of our garden, towering over three different properties. It was a most enticing thought, but without any doubt whatever, deserved the label of a “Bier Idee” as it is so beautifully and aptly described in German. That experience of the one hour in that machine was amazing for me. The feeling of rising effortlessly, gliding along with the world at my feet, that freedom which only birds can enjoy was absolutely amazing. When we returned I saw the relief in Sylvia’s eyes. She had hated the thought of me vanishing in that metal and perspex contraption. I knew that additional flying lessons would be extremely costly, that even if I passed the course, it would be even more costly to retain the validity of such a licence. Thus it was that I gave up on the wish to fly a helicopter – but this was only possible because of the most thoughtful and loving gift which my children had given me.

What more can I possibly want?? - Absolutely nothing! I have a wonderful, caring, loving and devoted wife. We have a brood who in turn are creating their own families. I have never a moment in which there isn’t something that I ought to be doing, in exceedingly sharp contrast to so many others who are bored and just waiting for the end. We live in exquisite surroundings unable to see or hear our neighbours in a house we love. Who could possibly want anything more?